PIONEERS OF PARADISE AND BARDO SURFERS: NEAR-DEATH EXPERIENCES, MORMON OTHERWORLDLY JOURNEYS, AND VAJRAYANA METAPHYSICS

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by

Fiona Maud McMillan

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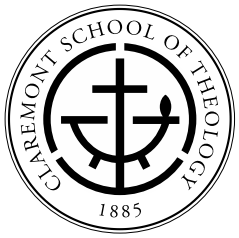

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Abstract

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Most religions offer explanations about death and the afterlife, and even in modern Western society non-religious people have beliefs about life after death. Secular society is often dismissive of these beliefs, yet they persist and despite predictions that they would fade, are still widespread. Movies such as *Coco* (2017) reveal a deep human fascination with the afterlife. The taboo on discussing the afterlife has waxed and waned since Victorian times and given the fascination with near-death experiences in popular culture, which is spurred by easy access to this information through social media, this interest is growing. Two religious faiths, Mormonism and Tibetan Buddhism have very different descriptions of death and the after-death state; but these ideas are central to the lived experience of their belief systems. They both share beliefs in life before birth on Earth, this Earth life is part of a larger transitional process or plan. Both religions prepare their adherents for the after-death state by offering teachings, rituals and practical measures to ensure a positive transition to the after-death state. They see death not as the end of life, but as a gateway into a transformed state of being. These are both religions that are based on authority and lineage, rather than the casual individualistic popular forms of modern Western spirituality. Their teachings on the afterlife are based on religious experiences and insights that culminate from many followers and leaders. For this reason, examining their afterlife beliefs is important.

This dissertation concentrates on data relating to Mormon visions of the "otherside". It then links the data into the field of Near-Death Studies, Eschatology, Thanatology, and wider

aspects of theology such as religious experience. We then consider different academic perspectives which offer explanations for anomalous experiences of the "Otherworlds", whether through NDEs, psychedelics or other avenues. These explanations offer insights into consciousness and the human condition, but all fail to provide a comprehensive or satisfactory explanation for NDEs. A completely different perspective, that of Tibetan Buddhism, is then introduced as another way to understand the afterlife. The Tibetan Books of the Dead genre and the Delog genre are both sources for the Bardo traditions. Throughout these discussions the nature of consciousness, with its often misunderstood and its mysterious properties, emerges as the key linking factor. This raises questions such as the nature of identity, and how individual consciousness relates to a greater consciousness. I will consider whether afterlife experiences should be understood as a passive experience of something received from outside, or whether the deceased plays an active role in the experience. I will suggest that they are partially internal, induced, or co-created experiences, reflective of one's culture and spiritual context, which are part of a cosmic process humans have yet to understand. Cultural reflections apparent in afterlife descriptions are not problematic if the possibility of the multiple afterlives model is adopted. I argue that the focus in Comparative Theology should not be placed on the elements of the religious experiences but rather the universal shared experience of the continuation of conscious awareness in the liminal state between realms and NDEs.

I conclude by arguing that to understand the NDE phenomenon, and other similar anomalous experiences, an alternative paradigm is required. This paradigm, whilst novel for reductionist science, is in fact an ancient attitude which agrees with modern ideas of non-local consciousness. I believe the explanation for reports of visiting an afterlife realm and for the question of survival after death is to be found by examining religions such as Mormonism and

Tibetan Buddhism. Vajrayana philosophy is in accord with the theory that consciousness pervades reality, as a field of fundamental energy, and loving intelligence. It is the essential life force of our universe. I will claim that consciousness creates matter and not the reverse, and that this affects all beings and realms of this world and the next. It requires a revision of the typically accepted definition of the nature of reality. Afterlives appear to be the result of human manifestation and co-creative interaction with non-local consciousness. All sentient beings are linked by a web of super, interdependent, and pervasive consciousness where all parts co-exist in loving relationship with others reflecting the all-loving nature of the living cosmos.

Acknowledgments

بِسْمِ اللَّـهِ الرَّحْمَـٰنِ الرَّحِيمِ [1]

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[1] In the Name of God, the Beneficent, The Merciful.

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Introduction

> Could you gaze into heaven five minutes, you would know more than you would by reading all that was ever written on the subject.
>
> — Joseph Smith, Jr.[1]

Preface: Thesis and Major Themes

This dissertation will examine religious experiences of the afterlife and Otherworlds. It will use the lens of Comparative Theology to study Mormon and Tibetan Buddhist experiences and suggest various explanations from scholars, scientists, and theologians. What I realized when I started to compare and analyze the data of hundreds of near-death experiences was the paranormal aspect that did not fit into the current scientific paradigm. It became obvious that our current view of reality and the role of consciousness is insufficient and that alternative paradigms need to be explored that challenge the current presumptions and even ancient ones resurrected. Mormon and Tibetan ideas of the afterlife are very different, more differences than similarities.

Comparative Theology is a discipline that takes a deep look at two or more religions and compares them not just exoterically and esoterically with the goal of coming to a deeper knowledge about their implications. Mormonism and Tibetan Buddhism might seem to be worlds apart and hold many contradictory doctrines. The Mormon afterlife might seem to apply to Mormons and the Tibetan to the Tibetans. However, if humanity as a whole is considered, along with the certainty of death, then death is universal. Perhaps death is the end, or perhaps there is an afterlife. If there is an afterlife, do we all end up in the same place or go to different places? Of course, this leads to speculation and one's positionality will influence one's answer.

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[1] Joseph Smith, 9 October 1843, in History, 1838–1856 (Manuscript History of the Church), volume E-1 [1 July 1843–30 April 1844], p. 1750, The Joseph Smith Papers, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1838-1856-volume-e-1-1-july-1843-30-april-1844/122#facts.

Some scholars describe and compare religions afterlife doctrines, but I feel there is a value in comparing afterlife experiences. If Mormons and Tibetans both claim to experience an afterlife realm then surely it is important to compare these! The comparison, which will I expect entails similarities and differences, will shed light not only on the claims of these traditions, but perhaps on the fate of humanity after death. There is no right or wrong answer, and each tradition offers a rich and meaningful view of the afterlife. I think that comparison will lead to a deeper appreciation, beyond conflicts of truth, to the understanding of what it means to be human and the nature of reality.

Both Mormonism and Tibetan Buddhism strongly assert the continuation of conscious awareness after death and preexistent awareness before birth, even if it is forgotten. Even though cultural context strongly influences what is experienced in the afterlife, it does not explain the veracity of NDEs away.... it explains their content but not the mechanism behind them and of continued awareness. Psychedelic visions are so similar that it can also be argued that they too seem to touch on this realm of consciousness that science has no explanation for. It is like consciousness in this Otherworldly realm is a house that has many doors of entry. My theory negates the idea that consciousness arises from the physical brain and asserts that it is non-local. Our ability to co-create our afterlives avoids the pitfalls and simplicity of classical perennialism. i.e., the universal here is not the afterlife per se, but the continuation of conscious awareness, and it allows for diversity.

The Tibetan Buddhist doctrine of self-created visions illustrates this point. We all dream but the content of our dreams is different.... dreams and afterlives are different but related conscious states. A non-local theory consciousness helps explain not only NDEs, but the variety and difference of visions perceived, and thus it provides a way to explain multiple truths and

multiple faith claims about heaven and Bardos without conflict. Simply put the cosmos is alive, filled with an intelligent and loving Ultimate Consciousness and this is so comprehensive that everything that exists, all difference, and all diversity exists within it. My title refers to the spiritual journey to an experiential frontier, and this is the frontier not just to otherworldly realms but to the limits of our understanding. This Ultimate Consciousness is like an ocean, upon which we surf, vibrating as we traverse waves and what we perceive as self is part of the very 'water' we surf upon.

The Nature of This Dissertation

Why does my dissertation matter? In this dissertation I chose to compare Mormon NDEs and then link them to Tibetan ideas because Comparative Theology is an excellent way to understand afterlife phenomena from two very different perspectives and this contributes to progress in trying to understand the ultimate mystery of the after-death state.

Both traditions come from relatively remote and small human groups and yet they seem to offer deep explanations that may mainstream approaches fail to appreciate. My study of visions of the other side, or the afterlife matters because we all die, and most humans live their lives in the knowledge that they will die. What happens at death, and even after death is a mystery. No matter how much we distract ourselves the death of others and eventually our own deaths will greatly affect us and our friends, family, and world.

Death is also a taboo subject of conversation in the West. The Tibetans tell us to prepare for death, and to understand it so that fear is lost. Indeed, those who claim to have had near-death experiences (NDEs) often lose their fear of death. To lose the fear of death, is to receive the freedom to live with courage and purpose. Death has been a taboo in modern secular culture, but the Victorians, and other cultures take a different perspective on its significance. Both the

Mormons and the Tibetans live in extended communities that have collective rituals and ways to cope with death on both a social and religious level. Their narratives and scriptures show that far from being atomized individuals, we are part of a greater community, part of the flow of life and death that is a natural part of our cosmos. Understanding what world religions and scholars and scientists have to say about death and reading the narratives of those who came close to death, sheds light not just on the nature of death but reveals the miracle that we are alive now.

This dissertation will be an original contribution to the knowledge of the field of Near-Death Studies and fill a knowledge gap. Whilst much is written about generic and typical NDEs, very few experiences from minorities are recorded. Mormon 'Veil Thinning experiences' (VTEs) and 'bedside spiritual experiences' have been mostly unknown outside of that community and have not been the focus of much scholarly research outside of that circle. Mormon data in this area is a rich and important contribution to the field of Near-Death Studies, Eschatology and Thanatology.

There are three parts of the dissertation, and each offers various perspectives and encourages a change in basic assumptions in how reality is perceived, i.e., a 'paradigm shift'.

(1) I propose in this dissertation, that the afterlife realms have an ontological reality.

(2) My method is phenomenological, that is, relying on the experiences themselves, and letting VTEs speak for themselves. Many theologians study texts, translate and provide exegesis to draw out subtle meanings from sacred texts and are associated with archeological remains as a resource for understanding religion. Texts, however, are secondary to a previous revelation, inspiration, or spiritual insight, even the result of a religious experience. At the heart of religion is a religious experience of the invisible world of the divine.

Core Headings It is this essential experience of the *numinous* and the *mysterium trememdum* that interests me.[2] I am inspired by the approach of the scholar William James and seek to understand religion by examining religious experience, notably the near-death experience (NDE), because it is very important and relevant to each of us personally given that we will all die. Many theologians also focus on the voices of powerful institutional figures such as Popes, Saints, and famous leaders. I prefer to listen to the voices of ordinary people, and to investigate their lived religion. Their cultural context is an important factor in understanding their experiences. We all have biases and opinions, often based on our cultural location, and self-awareness of how this influences our spirituality and how we interpret the spirituality of others is important. Some critics might argue that NDEs are not 'real' and therefore it is a waste of time to write about them. I admit that even before I wrote this dissertation several years ago, I accepted the possibility of NDEs as part of my own faith and beliefs. Nevertheless, now my understanding is enriched and has developed and is ever evolving, which is a healthy indicator of an open mind. There is no actual proof that NDEs are 'real', and it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to argue that then are 'real'. NDEs positively impact the life of the experiencers and enrich spirituality and popular culture, and even if the reader rejects many explanations offered in this dissertation, this beneficial impact must be appreciated.

Situatedness: My Location

I have an eclectic religious background, being a cradle Anglican, influenced by Spiritualism, who then converted to Islam for two decades. I was baptized in the LDS church and

[2] Rudolf Otto, *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen* (Gotha, Ger.: Leopold Klotz, 1926).

received confirmation but have not proceeded to receive endowments. I have also taken Tibetan Buddhist precepts in a ceremony conducted by Garchen Rinpoche, of the Karma Kagyu School. I also am a Druid, and belong to the Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, although this organization is more a philosophy of life centered around a nature spirituality, and not a formal religion based on any set beliefs or doctrines.[3] Members of my family have experiences NDEs and OBEs, and I myself have has some visionary and spiritual experiences, although not of this sort.

Recently I underwent my first clinical hypnosis session, and in this I had a spiritual experience involving an ascension to the blissful embrace of some gigantic ancient goddesses. As I left them, I was given a message in the form of a symbol, θænətɒs, or the Greek letter theta, Θ the symbol of Thanatos personification of Death. He is the twin of Hypnos hɪpnɒs, the personification of sleep. The twins are sons of Nyx Νύξ the Night, who dwells in the underworld far from the rays of the sun. They are not to be feared but are guides to take us on our journey. The Greeks and many ancient societies had their own versions of the afterlife, but turning to the Tibetan perspective, there is a close relationship between sleep and death, because both are Bardo forms. This relationship will be explained in chapter five of the dissertation.

I also have my own relationship with death. Just over ten years ago I took Clinical Pastoral Education at a local hospital, and I was a trainee volunteer chaplain, and, on many days, I faced the death of patients. Many patients had no strong religious affiliation and wanted to discuss death but not in personally religious ways. One of the hardest times I faced was witnessing the death of infants in the NICU. I was able to deal with my first encounter using my logical mind and maintain composure and provide what little comfort I could to the grieving

[3] Order of Bards, Ovates and Druids, "Experience the Power of an Ancient Tradition: Order of Bards, Ovates & Druids," accessed September 5, 2024, https://druidry.org/.

parents, but when I got home the implications of holding a dead baby turned my stomach and I was physically sick and shaken up. My whole being, my own role as a mother of seven children, revolted against what seemed the painfully unnatural and devastating truth of such a death.

When I explore and write about death, I do not take it lightly, for I have had a close encounter with deaths of many close to me in my life, from loved ones lost to violence in the Middle East, to the death of my parents during my early twenties, and the loss of friends of all ages. I witness the tragedy and evil of needless death in the world from warfare, poverty, and I began my research during the covid pandemic which took the lives of many, including some family members. It is my faith in the divine, in the afterlife, in the purpose of life, which has given me hope and resilience.

Writing about NDEs has been both a walk of faith for me, changed and developed my own ideas, and left me determined to spread the message that humans need to wake up, join and work for a better world, for our lives are shoer and there is much to accomplish in the way of peace, justice, health, happiness and prosperity for all. The message of NDEs is this…to love and spread compassion until our own time comes.

Approach in This Dissertation

Mormon NDEs provide a rich source of testimony which has largely been unexplored and ignored by academia. It occurred to me that the journeys of Mormon Pioneers westward looking for a new Zion in American history seemed to parallel a similar kind of pioneering quest for paradise, namely the Spirit World beyond the Veil in their religious worldview. I will provide a thorough background of Mormon afterlife beliefs and the topography of the spiritual worlds. This is different from most mainline Christian beliefs about heaven and hell. This background is

necessary for a full understanding of how Mormon NDEs fit into a theological system. Progressive revelation, the fluidity and evolving nature of Mormon Theology and Cosmology throughout the last two centuries will be explained.

Why Mormon NDEs are significant and why Mormon cultural context is important in the polarity of universal and local: When studying a genre of religious experience at the universal global level, I imagine a jigsaw with distinct communities offering up a unique piece that helps to complete a more holistic picture of that human experience. All humans die, all humans have a brain, and all humans have or will experience dying these are universal facts. Humans also are individuals, and as such belong to communities and cultures, religions or other groupings which color their perceptions and interpretation of reality. This interplay between the universal and the local and specific accounts for differences in religious experiences. These nuances must be considered when reading the narratives of experiencers.

Any study of Mormon religious experiences requires an understanding of both theological and cultural context sand their influences on the interpretation of the experiences. However, these experiences also need to be compared to similar experiences outside this local context because key elements of the experiences such as autoscopy and telepathic communication do appear to be universal and the global, even cosmic levels need to be considered also. Death is a universal phenomenon, and each culture explains it differently. One expects to find both similarities and differences in these religious explanations and the comparative method helps bring clarity to the universal aspects, which might hold the key to explaining a common human destiny after death.

Methodology, and the Organization of Data

My position is that the heart and origin of religion stems from a personal experience, a religious experience. Many modern people enrich their lived religion with texts and rituals, but the essence is in communication with the invisible, the divine or otherworldly, with faith insists is there, despite the lack of scientific empirical evidence. This is a comparative theological dissertation leaning heavily on Vajrayana insights on the religious experience of death which can be used to view Western, or more specifically Mormon near- death and critical visionary otherworldly experiences from a different angle. Each of the three sections of this dissertation will employ different methodological tools to suit the task at hand. In part one, empirical, historical, socio-cultural, psychological, and phenomenological approaches will be used.

In part two, the comparative method of religious studies will be used. In part three Buddhist metaphysics, and philosophy will be used. near-death and visionary religious experiences of the Otherworlds are a complex, poorly understood, even mysterious topic that requires treatment from various angles. Indeed, the field is most often approached from the disciplines of medicine, neuroscience, physics, and psychology on the one hand, and folklore studies on the other. Previous theological PhD dissertations on NDEs have tended to focus on the observable outcomes of the experience, from the perspective of chaplaincy and rarely can a comparativist study be found.

Each part of my dissertation employs different methods. The bulk of this dissertation lays out the substantial and solid data, collected after hundreds of hours of collecting, reading, and listening to recorded narratives of Mormon and some non-Mormon NDEs. It is a data driven dissertation as my reader will see from the table of contents. These records of NDEs are a fascinating record of human religious experiences of the most profound nature and I am excited

to be able to share this data and analysis to my readers. Prior scholarship is also scant in appreciating the rich and extensive records of Mormon spiritual beliefs and practices, which also deserve respect and attention.

In my dissertation, part one employs empirical phenomenology, and a historical socio-anthropological cultural study of NDEs. I am a theologian and not a social scientist, and this is a theological dissertation. I looked at different methodologies utilized by scholars investigating religious experiences and altered states of consciousness. My main methodological influences in this section of the dissertation are the approaches of Karin Dahlberg, author of Reflective Lifeworld Research (2009), which is regarded as a modern practical application of phenomenology as influenced by Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

The organizational guidelines for my fieldwork come from phenomenological approaches and methods of data analysis by Max Van Manen, Clark Moustakas, and Adrian Van Kaam. I will demonstrate awareness of the useful insights of the historical method, narratology and folklore studies when exploring NDEs, especially since the latter is the preferred approach from previous Mormon scholars investigating the topic. I am also aware of the myriads of approaches used in the past to discuss religious experiences, and that in this decade, the pioneering work of Robert Forte and Benny Shanon in the field of altered states of awareness recommend a cognitive science approach.

There are many precedents for a mixed methodology based primarily on phenomenology such as the collected works of Sir Alister Hardy in the field of religious experience, William James who pioneered the examination of religious experiences as private, individual experiences, Mircea Eliade who skillfully blended phenomenological with a psycho-historical approach, and Ian Stevenson who collected reports of reincarnation amongst children in India. Secondly, there

are only a handful of PhD dissertations on NDEs and all of them have chosen phenomenology alone as a methodology.

Since the times of these classic scholars modified and more flexible methodologies have evolved which are compatible with a mixed interdisciplinary methodological approach which avoid the strict, unnatural, and arbitrary disciplinary boundaries of 20th century academia. Religious Studies after all is not a 'pure' discipline, and at a time when even the suitability and accuracy of the very term 'religion' is debated, and when the boundary between Theology and Religious Studies is obscure, many religious studies scholars have utilized methods from Social Anthropology, Ethnography, History, Psychology, Sociology, And Philosophy. The 'reflexive lifeworld research' model as demonstrated by Dahlberg, is one of the most appropriate to study NDEs from my perspective.

In *Reflective Lifeworld Research* 2009 Karin Dahlberg gives practical suggestions about how to gather and process data tied to humans, especially lived experiences. She introduces the concept of the lifeworld and uses multiple methods in research and fieldwork to deal with reports of lived experiences and narrated stories. She highlights the importance of cultural awareness and cultural context. It is a qualitative methodology helpful for studies that focus on the collection and analysis of data linked to concrete lived experiences, including religious experiences such as NDEs. She uses methodological triangulation to capture as many aspects as possible of the phenomenon under investigation, including its context, and reminds the researcher that is it not like picking flowers!

The topic of death has always been *taboo* in the modern Western culture, especially since the advance of medicine erased the common experience of losing family members and young children to disease back in pre-modern times. Even with the decline of organized religion, the

rise of materialism and science, and the disenchantment of the universe, ordinary people still hope that a heaven awaits them after death. At times of tragedy, movements that promise the hope of eternal life flourish, which explains the rise of spiritualism and mediumship after the Civil War in the United States, and World War One.

The New Age movement of recent years and the prominence of psychics on television are part of a sub-culture that also embraces astral travel, ayahuasca psychedelic trips, paranormal investigations, and of course near-death experiences or NDEs. These movements are all connected; both Spiritualism and Mormonism emerged in the same area of upstate New York in the 1830s and 1840s, spurred on by the Second Great Awakening. Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), whose famous descriptions of Heaven inspired many Hollywood depictions, was highly influential, as was Madame Blavatsky (1831-1891) of the Theosophical Movement, Phineas Quimby of the New Thought Movement, Frederic W.H. Myers, and Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) of the Transcendentalist Movement.[4] All these spiritual movements embraced romanticism, and idealism in reaction to intellectualism, the rise of science, and the decline of traditional Christianity.

Even as Charles Darwin published *On the Origin of Species* in 1858, stressing the animal origins of humans, Mormons in Utah were proclaiming that humans were literally the children of a Heavenly Father whose real and eternal home was in a heavenly abode. Visions and experiences of the afterlife were transcribed and recorded, circulated in oral tradition, decades before NDEs became a household word. Joseph Smith's 'First Vision' indeed contains echoes of NDE themes and is a cornerstone of the Mormon tradition.

Definitions and the Problem of Labels

Some Mormon scholars have indeed studied near-death experiences or NDEs, as well as Deathbed Visions, communication with the spirits of the deceased and visions of dead ancestors in the Temple and they have used the actual term NDE to describe these visions. However, I need to challenge and discuss the use of such labels as NDE which can be very limiting and indeed impact the trajectory of discussion and analysis of this phenomenon. The usage of certain terms in popular culture pressures me to use these terms such as NDE or Mormon, even if these are not my preferred terms.

Definition of Terms Mormon, the Church, VTE, Otherworlds and the Veil

Mormon is a loose term that can refer to various scores of offshoot sects and movements descended from Joseph Smith Jr.'s original church. It includes the Community of Christ (the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints from 1872 to 2001), Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and the more well known Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, which, as of December 2023, had a membership of 17,225,394.[5] Mormon Studies is the relevant field of academic study, but recently the use of Mormon to describe LDS members has been discouraged.[6] When I use the term Mormon, I am referring to the general

[5] The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Facts and Statistics," accessed October 29, 2024, https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/facts-and-statistics.

[6] Sarah Jane Weaver, "'Mormon' Is Out— Church Releases Statement on Name of Organization," August 16, 2018, https://www.thechurchnews.com/2018/8/16/23221370/mormon-is-out-church-releases-statement-name-of-organization/#:~:text=In%20the%20first%20reference%2C%20the,is%20also%20accurate%20and%20encouraged.

Latter Day Saint religious movement comprising of various denominations, or sects connected to Joseph Smith Jr. (1805-1844) and those who follow or have founded groups evolved from his religious teachings.

The Church of Christ was founded in New York in 1830 and was renamed the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in 1838. This is the church that most people are familiar with and refer to as the LDS church. It is now a huge international organization which includes members from all over the world and it is the most influential group in the movement. Recently there was a call to stop referring to LDS church members as 'Mormons' and usage of the term was discouraged and not authorized. [7] However, the term is still used in certain colloquial ways because it is shorter and easier to say. It is also the term still linked in academic circles to the field of Mormon Studies. There is also the Community of Christ, sometimes referred to as the RLDS based in Missouri,[8] and the FLDS of Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, as well as many much smaller groups and break away factions which follow different lineages.

Mormonism is a faith that aims for the Restoration of the early Church and adheres to 'progressive revelation' which is facilitated by human-divine communication via the Church leadership. [9] While all those who identify as 'Mormon' descended from the Church and teachings of Joseph Smith, there are various sects and denominations, and since each of these accepts progressive revelation, differences in beliefs, doctrines and practices have developed

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[7] Weaver, "'Mormon' is out.

[8] The Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints 1872-2001 became the Community of Christ.

[9] God's revelation is adapted to the needs and circumstances of the community and so it is flexible. This has led to competing claims amongst leaders, led to some schism and changing of doctrines over the years. This is why authority and authoritative teachings from the President of the Church hold importance.

between them. In this dissertation I use the term Mormon, usually for the LDS, the largest Church, but even within this body, as well as between all Mormons, there are differences and subtle variant ideas. Mormonism, like any religion, is not a monolith. It contains internal variations. I prefer to view it as an umbrella, where varieties and persuasions of Mormons can identify across a spectrum from conservative to liberal, active to non-active, etc. Peter Berger famously described this complexity in his concept of the Sacred Canopy.[10] Therefore my VTE data reflects the Sacred Canopy of Mormonism, with some experiencers presenting more extreme views than others.

After completing fieldwork, most of the testimonies come from LDS sources and most of them from Utah or the Western United States. Thus, my dissertation cannot claim to be inclusive of all groups and their geographical regions. It is limited to the demographics, ethnicities, and regions where most LDS members live in the USA simply because most materials in this field were produced by them.

I am broadening my dissertation to include not just NDEs but other similar phenomenon in the areas that involve what religious people call the afterlife and communication with the spirit world. The term NDE is a category that I do not want to limit myself to, because it suggests narrow boundaries, and it excludes other types of religious experience that might have a bearing on, or which are connected to it. The term NDE, near-death experience, suggests that it is an experience that occurs when people are on death's doorstep, or clinically dead for a short time, before being revived. The problem here is that similar religious experiences occur when people are not near-death, and then there is the problem of defining death. Using the term Veil thinning

[10] Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy : Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (Doubleday, 1967).

experiences in the Mormon context, allows for a widening of such experiences to all religious experiences of the spirit world.

Categorization is useful because it aids in the arrangement of data and its sorting and analysis, and the Western tradition has excelled in the rigor of its labeling and categorization for the last three hundred years. However, labels have drawbacks, they can be limiting, and lead to inaccuracy due to stereotyping and they don't always fit. While most people understand the term *religion* generally, providing a definition has eluded scholars while terms such as *Hinduism* and *Buddhism* can be viewed as an erroneous product of colonial misunderstanding. The meaning of labels shifts over time and between different contexts and yet finding substitutes is not easy.

The term near-death experience is broadly understood in popular culture, ever since Raymond Moody's book *Life After Life* popularized the term and the concept in 1975. The Library of Congress provides cataloging labels for subjects, and it uses the term future life to refer to the afterlife, which is not obvious to the uninitiated, but it has also the term near-death experience to refer to spiritual experiences in the genre of spiritual experiences around the time of death or potential death. It does not use the more conveniently shorter acronym NDE, which is more commonly used in social media. Derivatives such as NDEer (people who experiences NDEs), and other abbreviations such as SDE (shared death experience), STE (spiritually transforming experience) are commonly used in modern culture, which since the rise of texting and the internet abounds in shortened labels for descriptors. The problem is this, the label, while intended to be useful, can constrain and limit the phenomena being described and as more kids of spiritual experiences are being described in the worldwide information highways, the boundaries between them are blurring, so that one might have an NDE-like experience with all its elements without technically being near-death.

Many of the experiences I found when researching Mormon experiences with 'the other side' were experienced during times of trauma and illness, but others were religious visions of a more mystical type, related to the human-divine encounter of church leaders. In other cases, dreams were involved. I suggest, after reading about the different states of conscious awareness found in Tibetan doctrines, that certain liminal states of mind, open up 'channels' for Otherworldly encounters.

I would add that while categorization is important it does not provide an explanation. Anyone who has read multiple accounts of Otherworldly experiences is going to ponder the cause of it all and to question the nature of reality. Mormons and Tibetans will explain these experiences in terms of their theologies, but the rest of humankind has different explanations. No explanation has yet been scientifically proven correct and much has to be accepted on the basis of faith and personal opinion.

General Definition of an NDE – Why I prefer the Term VTE

A near-death experience is a form of religious, otherworldly, or mystical experiences that is sometimes experienced when a person comes close to death. It is a journey, and its components are familiar to me after reading and listening to thousands of them. It is a journey with ubiquitous elements. It is a journey that involves not only transportation to otherworldly realms but also involves an emotional and spiritual journey that transforms the identity and outlook of the experiencer. It is not necessary for them to have literally died. However other anomalous experiences also share elements of NDEs, or visions of heaven or the spirit world that do not involve death. These include but are not limited to OBEs, psychedelic, shamanic and meditative altered states. As this dissertation will show, spiritual experiences that come in the

form of visions, dreams, deathbed visions, meditation, or from the injection of psychotropic substances can all produce experiences that share similar attributes.

The use of limited labels becomes too simplistic and erroneously separates and prevents comparison of similar phenomena. There is also the danger that if a person has a certain spiritual experience, they then might search to fit that experience into a box with a label that isn't a good fit, and which might even contaminate the expression of that experience. For example, throughout human history there have been visions of an afterlife, and of supernatural beings and reports of seeing dead relatives appear at the deathbed, but they were neither labeled as NDEs nor thought of in the way we conceptualize them in 2023. While I want to write without using the term NDE, I write in a culture that is familiar with the term and yet I am forced to use some terms to express certain spiritual experiences that occur in a particular culture and historical context.

I chose the term VTE, or Veil thinning experience because it offers a better description and does not carry the baggage of all the definitions of and elements that define an NDE. The definition of a Veil Thinning Experience or VTE: While NDE-like experiences are in the genre I will be examining, Mormon spiritual experiences of the afterlife and spirit world, there are other spiritual experiences that would not fit into the definition of a classic NDE. Many Mormon visions of the 'other side' were experienced by those not close to death. There is also the argument that if death is not 'real' in the sense that consciousness continues for all eternity, that referring to being near-death, is a senseless term. VTE refers to a *Veil thinning experience* and is suitable to describe Mormon experiences of the spirit world, and beings from and communications with the *other side of the Veil* that separates the realms of existence.

What is not often stated by those in the religious arena, but which is increasingly discussed in the NDE community is the concept of altered states of consciousness. NDEs and VTEs are examples of altered states. This means appreciating that not only are NDEs and VTEs part of a larger family of anomalous experiences, but that any discussion about all of these must address an understanding of consciousness. I will argue in this dissertation that the source and origin of these experiences is through and in consciousness, both personal consciousness and in universal consciousness. This approach allows the scholar to see a certain unity in the narrative accounts of anomalous experiences and a possible explanation based in unitive and Universal consciousness soon becomes apparent from any study of NDEs.

PART ONE: A THOROUGH STUDY OF MORMON VTES

Chapter One

Background of Mormon NDE Studies

The discipline of modern comparative religious studies has revealed that other cultures and religions have their own version of an afterlife, which despite surface differences, share not just a conviction of life after bodily death, but certain afterlife themes. Comparing the contents of NDEs to afterlife beliefs is both fascinating and important work.[1] While understanding this context is important, nothing will prejudice the focus of the dissertation, the data, which I believe will speak for itself. I will discuss the historical and universal aspect of NDEs, Mormon VTEs, and afterlife theology. Mormon views of the afterlife differ from tradition Judeo-Christian views. Mormon views of salvation tend to be more universalistic and less exclusive than other forms of Christianity. e.g., There is an absence of the picture of the eternal fires of Hell portrayed by other Christian denominations.

Two hundred years of Mormon NDE testimonies also provide some of the most richly detailed descriptions of the heavenly *Otherworlds* ever recorded. This chapter provides basic background information necessary to understand Mormon VTEs. It sets VTEs in their cultural context and provides a literature review of Mormon thinkers who wrote on this topic. This will allow the reader to follow my argument later in the dissertation that there is a link between Mormon and universal religious experiences, despite cultural influences, which are based in the

[1] Gregory Shushan has published extensively on these comparisons between NDEs and many modern and ancient World Religions and Indigenous Belief Systems, however he has not considered Mormon NDEs and Mormon afterlife beliefs.

universal psyche and mind consciousness of humans. Rather the similarity in cross cultural comparison is not to be found in the differences and similarities of the elements, but in the actual human capacity to experience other realms and journey into other dimensions of consciousness. Accepting that cultures and afterlives differ is the first step in understanding that the ability to expand consciousness and gain awareness outside of the body, is the common denominator. This is a shift in focus and a way to look at religious experience from a different perspective.[2]

Why Mormon Data Is Important

Mormonism has been described as the quintessential American religion and yet until quite recently the dominant Protestant culture in the United States has relegated it to the sidelines, excluded scholarly discussions and dismissed it as an unorthodox cult. At worse, Mormons have been persecuted and at best tolerated by the wider society. Similarly, NDEs and VTEs have been dismissed by mainstream scholars and scientists as paranormal fantasy, undeserving of proper investigation. Perhaps for this reason looking at this data has been sidelined, nevertheless it must be examined without bias. I will justify my study of Mormon VTEs and explain that rather focusing on unrelated individuals, which previous conversations about VTEs have done, that there is a value to understanding VTEs coming from a cohesive group embedded in a common culture and religion.

There is much to be gained by conducting a systematic study of NDEs by the gathering of data from a single demographic group belonging to a shared faith and culture. An extensive study of Mormon VTEs offers many advantages for a deep analysis of the phenomenon over a

[2] An analogy might be that a hundred people drive cars…. they are all different types and colors of cars, and the cars go to different places. Yet all the people are driving.

200-year period, occurring to members of a group sharing cultural cohesion and common religious beliefs. Given that the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints is a large worldwide organization with diverse members, I need to clarify which types of Mormon communities I will be focusing on. I will provide the context of VTEs and mainstream ideas of heaven, hell, and the afterlife.

The corpus of Mormon VTEs provides one of the most complete and detailed collections of NDEs in the world, and yet it remains largely unexplored. Here is a 200-year-old tradition which documented and complied a wealth of personal religious experiences, over a century before Moody drew attention to the phenomena.[3] The impact of atheistic materialism and its erosion of traditional Western Christian foundations is revealed by the fact that many experiencers are silenced by the fear of being labeled insane. Mormons are the exception because they live in a sub-culture which accepts the intervention of heavenly forces and spiritual communication with the Otherworlds.[4]

Influences and Context

Death in America and the Mormon perspective: Michael Kearl argues that American culture can best be understood in terms of its core salvific goal of death control and its

[3] Raymond A. Moody, *Life After Life: The Investigation of a Phenomenon—Survival of Bodily Death* (Mockingbird Books, 1975).

[4] It is important to note that Mormons were developing this genre of testimony over 100 years before Moody introduced the term NDE. Early Mormons did not learn about NDEs from popular culture, and they describe things that happened in their NDE that they had not heard of beforehand. Thus, the argument of critics that NDErs had heard or read about NDEs hardly applies here… many early Mormon NDErs were not aware of other NDE testimonies (although some were) to the extent the public is informed today by popular culture. Having an NDE before the knowledge of NDEs was widespread in culture is significant because it cannot be suggested that the experience was tainted by prior acquaintance with the phenomena. Therefore, it can be argued that NDEs prior to the 1970s, when the topic became more well known, is less likely to be influenced by or corrupted by prior knowledge. However, it is possible that given the existence of NDE testimonies in Mormon culture that Mormons have been more aware of the phenomena than other populations.

embracing of the hereafter: "He says American culture has an immortalist ethos." [5] Kearl discusses the role of the frontier in shaping activist immortalism. He says, "Origins of American's distinctive obsession with and active involvement towards death control undoubtedly derives from the transplantation of a relatively advanced Western civilization onto a primordial and particularly savage frontier, which provides one key for grasping the American character."[6] He says that the New World symbolized, for Europeans, the possibility for biographical rebirth and salvation, spiritually, socially and economically. "The United States had always nurtured hope for better futures, both Earthly and other-worldly." People's lives not bogged down by their class, or the history of the land…. there was a freedom. However natural dangers were lethal…. Wild animals, hurricanes, tornadoes, and weather extremes as well as aboriginal peoples.[7]

The third cultural force underlying Americans' drive to never die is their extreme individualism. The immigrants' emancipation from the homelands traditional restraints against personal self-seeking, coupled with the self-sufficiency required on the frontier, were to forge a distinctive national character featuring an 'anything is possible' mindset. Also forged was an accentuated sense of self that went against other collectivist cultures' priority of the survival of the group. In America, the culture is to take care of yourself first and others if energy is left over. Radical individualism. This has made Americans vulnerable to death. A way to counter this threat to meaning in life is belief in an afterlife.[8] As the Book of Mormon says, "The spirits of all

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[5] Michael Kearl, "You Never Have to Die! On Mormons, NDEs, Cryonics and the American Immortalist Ethos," in *The Unknown Country: Death in Australia, Britain, and the USA*, ed. Kathy Charmaz, Glennys Howarth, and Allan Kellehear (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997), 185.

[6] Kearl, "You Never Have to Die!" 186, 190.

[7] Kearl, "You Never Have to Die!" 190-191.

[8] Kearl. You Never Have to Die! in Kathy Charmaz. 191-2.

men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body … are taken home to that God who gave them life. (Alma 40:11) [9]

It occurred to me that the journeys of Mormon Pioneers westward looking for a new Zion in American history paralleled a similar kind of pioneering quest for paradise, namely the Spirit World beyond the Veil in their religious worldview. The stages of entry into the afterlife and the spirit world are part of a journey that begins in the premortal period according to the VTEs and Mormon doctrine. Mormon doctrine is based on scripture and texts, but at the root of these is divine revelation and personal religious experience. In addition, personal religious experiences and visions of church leaders and lay persons, have edified and helped to build up consensus of beliefs.

Veil Thinning Experience: VTE

The breadth of Mormon religious experience is such that the term NDE only covers a fraction of the types of experiences reported. Several scenarios or categories include deathbed visions, shared death experiences, premortal memories, and the field of child preexistence experiences, classic NDEs, and dream visions or Temple apparitions. All these visions happen when 'the Veil is thin' and for this reason I prefer to use the term Veil thinning experiences when describing the variations of Mormon religion experience. Joseph Smith's visions such as the First Vision in the Grove, and the visitations of the Angel Moroni are also included in the term VTE. VTEs come in various types, the most common being like a near-death experience or deathbed experience. However, they can also be prebirth memories, dreams, visions of angels or communication with ancestral spirits.

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[9] Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *The Book of Mormon; the Doctrine and Covenants of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints; the Pearl of Great Price* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1981). All references to the Book of Mormon are from this edition unless otherwise noted.

Therefore, VTEs are a supernatural type of experience within a Mormon context. It can be seen as a subset of religious and mystical experiences in general. What sets religious systems apart from other human systems are their claims to supernatural communication between the unseen spiritual worlds and the human world. Without this sacred and mystical aspect, without revelation and communication between the divine or spiritual realms and the ordinary human, religion would not be religion as we think of it. This is why religious experience plays an important role in the lives of the followers of a religion. It validates and also inspires their lived religious lives.

The label VTE is used to describe religious experiences and visions that occur in a Mormon context. It can be used to describe any human encounter with spirits or the divine. These experiences are influenced by popular culture and personal beliefs. There are varieties of VTEs ranging from promptings of the Holy Ghost to dreams, to Temple visions, angelic visions, ancestor visions, and NDE types. They include experiences had by both lay and church leaders. All have experiences had within the umbrella term VTE have distinct Mormon ambiances and involve cross veil communication when the veil 'thins' and allows contact to occur through it.

VTEs are related to mystical experiences that occur in other religious and secular contexts. However, if an Anglican had an NDE it would not qualify as a VTE, because it is lacking 'Mormonness'. Secondly, I have used the term VTEs to describe the narratives of experiencers who later converted to the Church, or even left the church, or were not active in the church. This is because I see their narratives are being seen through the eyes of those who did convert or were Mormon and who are part of both the active and inactive community. All these experiences are interconnected and part of a larger category. NDEs, as understood to be those described by Raymond Moody, are experiences that occur in many contexts and in the Mormon

context they come under the umbrella term of VTEs. In this dissertation most VTEs pertain to visions of the Spirit World, usually in a near-death context, a deathbed setting or a visionary dream.

Many Mormons share that loved deceased relatives have been seen in the Temple. How does a modern physician who is also an LDS voice describe VTE's? Jeff Driscoll M.D. says, "I think "near-death," and "shared death" terminology is unfortunate. It implies such experiences are associated only with death. I know firsthand they may come independent of death or dying and can be related to other liminal states such as intense prayerfulness or in the minutes before awakening from sleep. In fact, similar experiences can be powerfully associated with childbirth. The terminology also suggests the NDE recipient only comes *near* death, without actually dying. Death of course does not necessarily mean the end of life, for in Mormon and Tibetan doctrine it is just a transition to another state of existence.

Many who have passed through such experiences would argue they were, indeed, quite dead. I suspect their physicians would agree. And I doubt that debating the definitions of death would change anyone's mind. My twinge of discomfort about the terminology also stems from my personal encounters and from my simple understanding of birth, life, and death."[10] A better way to think of this is the Tibetan way, seeing death as a process and not a moment linked to a specific time on the clock. There is a period before and after death, when there is a possibility for the body can be revived. These experiences tend to occur in these grey zones, these transitional states.

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[10] Jeff O'Driscoll, *Not Yet: Near-Life Experiences & Lessons Learned* (n.p.: Jeff's Publishing Company, 2017), 8.

Approaches To Studying VTEs

When I approach my data, I appreciate its historical and cultural context. How Mormons themselves explain VTE's and the function of VTE's in supporting the theology is a key factor. Obviously, there is a loop whereby beliefs are influencing our experiences and experiences backing up our beliefs. However, as a theologian the questioning and implications run deeper and VTEs cannot simply be analyzed from a secular perspective because that rests on atheistic and reductionist assumptions that cannot be proven any more than a faith perspective can be disproven. A theologian has the liberty to keep open the possibility that there is a divine source to all religious and spiritual experiences. Thus VTE's, while rooted in and expressing an Earth-bound set of beliefs may not just be a product of that context, but that as they claim, a result of a heavenly or divine aspect that is also in play. The VTE's of early church leaders were formative and contributed to the development of the faith. VTEs also include the genre of church members who encounter their dead relatives and the traditions of deathbed visions or Temple appearances of spirits who attend their proxy endowments and sealings.

This is a society that is consumed with doing genealogical work for the dead, to do their Temple work, and to give their deceased relatives a chance to accept the Gospel in the Spirit World and continue their spiritual progression. It is not surprising therefore to read of missionary and Temple work taking place in the spirit world, and of real connections in practical and religious matters connecting families on both sides of the Veil. In 2023, at least before Covid, death was hidden or removed from modern life. Those who died usually did so in the privacy of a hospital room rather than at home. So, it is harder for us to appreciate the amount of death in early America. There was much death and maternal and child mortality in the 19th century, and life expectancy was lower and illnesses before antibiotics and medical care were more serious.

The pioneers suffered terribly. This was a group of people surrounded by death and they had to cope.

The Veil

When Mormon materials are studied the religious experiences and visions are more than the category of NDEs, and thus I prefer to use the term VTEs or Veil thinning experiences, because this is more inclusive of all communications across the Veil that separates the Earthly and non-Earthly realms of existence. It is necessary therefore to understand the Mormon concept of the Veil and how it operates in cosmology. Through the Veil we see the past and the future, and I interpret the word to refer to both a mental and physical curtain, one that both separates realms and yet allows for cross traffic. The heavens, whilst invisible to mortal eyes, is not far away and disconnected to Earth, but right here in another dimension of reality, and it is the Veil which provides this invisibility cloak. Similarly in Tibetan Buddhism, *Nirvana* is not a far-off polarity opposite to *Samsara*.[11] *Nirvana* is in fact here, but invisible to those whose perceptions are dulled by ignorance. On one level *Nirvana* and *Samsara* are the same, the difference only being in how the perceiver perceives reality. Religious people can gain the gift of communication with Spirit World and those entities there can choose to appear to humans on Earth. The Veil plays a part in Mormon Temple ritual; however, I respect the sacred nature of this and will not discuss this here.

At the funeral of Elder Thomas Williams on 28 July 1874, Brigham Young spoke of the Spirit World. He explained why it is not reasonable to converse with the dead across the Veil, because it would interfere with the reason why humans are on Earth and detract from the pursuits of this life. The Veil is there so that in most circumstances the other side is hidden, and we do not

[11] The Indian game of Snakes & Ladders has evolved from the Indian game based on samsaric journeying.

see God. Brigham Young said, “We have more friends behind the Veil than on this side, and they will hail us more joyfully than you were ever welcomed by your parents and friends in this world.”[12] Elder Parley P. Pratt wrote that the spirit world “is here on the very planet where we were born, or, in other words, the Earth and other planets of a like sphere have their inward or spiritual spheres as well as their outward, or temporal. The one is peopled by temporal tabernacles and the other by spirits. A Veil is drawn between the one sphere and the other whereby all the objects in the spiritual sphere are rendered invisible to those in the temporal.”[13] President Ezra Taft Benson declared that “the spirit world is not far away. Sometimes the Veil between this life and the life beyond becomes very thin. Our loved ones who have passed on are not far from us.”[14] Jeff O’ Driscoll M.D. writes a lot about the Veil in his book *Not Yet* and he says,

> I think of it this way: the boundary between mortality and eternity—a boundary often referred to as a Veil—is drawn back at birth and death, allowing spirits to pass between realms of existence. If I'm near the Veil—spiritually near, that is—a portion of eternal glory splashes through and onto me. So why don't more people see and hear all these spirits coming and going in the ER? In my experience, it's because we are wrapped in a Veil of flesh that impairs our sight and muffles our hearing, and because our preoccupations with the things of this world block our spiritual receptiveness. Spirits are very near during birth and death, but the profound joy experienced when a child arrives and the deep sorrow experienced when a loved leaves, consume our attention. The emotional extremes of mortality leave little room for spiritual awareness. Every time a soul draws back the curtain on your left to enter the room or draws back the curtain on your right to leave the room, some of that brilliant light spills into the darkness around you. The closer you are to · the opening, the more light you experience. In my analogy, mortality falls between the curtains of our mortal bodies. On our left is birth on our right is death; We set aside a portion of our glory to be here, to learn and experience and grow.

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[12] Brigham Young, *Deseret News: Semi-Weekly*, July 28, 1874, 1, quoted in Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, *Teachings of Presidents of the Church*, vol. 1, *Brigham Young (1847–77)* (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1997), 279, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-brigham-young/chapter-38?lang=eng.

[13] Parley Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology* (BoD–Books on Demand, 2023), 80, quoted in Brent Top, “Where Is the Spirit World and How Can We Feel Those on the Other Side?” LDS Living, June 14, 2017, https://www.ldsliving.com/where-is-the-spirit-world-and-how-can-we-feel-those-on-the-other-side/s/82520.

[14] Ezra Taft Benson, “Life is Eternal,” *Ensign,* June 1971, 33.

> The light and glory spills into this realm as souls pass through the Veil. Sometimes souls (or spirits or beings). Are coming and sometimes they're going. Occasionally, they hover between. Once in a while a person from either side draws back the Veil 'Without passing through, giving a glimpse of eternity independent of birth or death. In each of these scenarios, when we experience the light we stand a little nearer to the glorious life that once was ours and will be again. For that reason, I call these *Near-Life Experiences.* We are glorious beings too often unaware, wrapped in the Veil that is our mortal body. Parting the Veil happens in its most profoundly way when we enter and leave out body through birth and death. Sometimes, however, our spirits see and hear and comprehend without leaving the body.[15]

This excerpt speaks for itself and is a classic example of a VTE, complete with a description of the Veil and autoscopy which is both a personal experience and confirmation of a personal Mormon based theology. Church leaders described the Otherworlds in detail, and their teachings help frame Mormon VTEs, which are often reflective of these descriptions. The limitations however are that non-Mormon afterlives were not the focus of these traditions. Religious experiences are treated within the 'Mormon box' so to speak and not from a perspective outside of it.

Mormon Cosmology Background

A Mormon View of Death: Brigham Young described death in simple, comforting terms as merely a "change."[16] The VTE's below echo this sentiment. He said, "the change from mortal to immortality is no greater, comparatively speaking, than when a child emerges into this world. We shall suffer no more in putting off this flesh and leaving the spirit houseless than the child, in its capacity, does in its first efforts to breathe the breath of this mortal life."[17] In a similar vein President Heber C. Kimball, gave this description stressing the continuity of existence and life:

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[15] O'Driscoll, *Not Yet*, 8-9.
[16] Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1860), 8:28-29.
[17] Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 8:28-29.

We say the dead have departed this life as though they had departed to some other life. This, however, is not so; dying is like going from one room to another, or from one part of the Earth to another, the life still exists though the body decays, but the life which dwelt in it is indestructible.[18]

As John Taylor said about death:

> The present is only *one stage of our existence.* We existed before we came here; we exist here for a time, and when we depart from this mortal life we shall have a spiritual existence ...without the body, and then again with the body [at the Resurrection].[19]

Veil-Thinning Experiences (VTErs) tend to lose their fear of death. As Franklin D. Richards stated, "Latter-day Saints who live their religion having a testimony of Jesus, have no fear of death."[20] It is faith in Jesus Christ, and participation in the true church that ensures salvation in Mormon doctrine. While atheists and naturalistic science posit a 'dead' universe that evolved by chance, and mainstream Christianity concedes that somewhere 'out there" a heavenly realm exists, Mormons live in a universe that is influenced and molded by divine purpose. Not all mainstream Christians accept miraculous intervention by the divine, but Mormon Theology describes a cosmos where Earth and the heavens exist together in tandem as part of the Plan of Salvation.

Miracles, intervention, promptings of the Spirit, healing from the laying of hands, are part and parcel of LDS faith. When I pray, Heavenly Father literally listens and knows what I am saying and can respond by sending signs, the Holy Ghost and angelic messengers to assist. J.A.

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[18] Heber C. Kimball, *Journal of Discourses* (London: Latter-day Saints' Book Depot, year), 10:100; emphasis added.

[19] John Taylor, funeral services of Sister Elizabeth H. Cannon, January 29, 1882; *Journal of Discourses,* 22:354. Young, Brigham, 1801-1877Watt, G. D. (George Darling), 1815-1881Long, J. V. Journal of Discourses.Vol.22. BYU. 1882.

[20] Franklin D. Richards, *Collected Discourses,* 2nd ed., ed. Brian H. Stuy (Scarborough, Canada: BHS Publishing, 1886-89), 1:4; emphasis added, punctuation modernized.

Stapley writes about the development of Mormon healing rituals that propose continuationism and reject cessationism as part of restoration theology. He says, "Mormonism was thus one of the earliest American Christian denominations to establish a common and lasting healing liturgy."[21] Stapley also nods to the power of VTE's when the very first sentence of his book starts with the sick bed vision of Brigham Young in 1847 when he sees the 'deceased' Joseph Smith, who explains ritual and the theology of salvation in the context of all of human and cosmic history.[22] Temple rituals can bond non relatives into kinship for eternity and this shows to me the possibility of total human interconnection, which leads me to think of quantum and consciousness connections as described in Tibetan Buddhism. Mormon deathbed rituals [23] were also formulated at an early date in the Church and grew into the perfect 'beautiful death' scenarios and traditions, with family surrounding the dying person and then the funerary customs and funeral sermons which expounded eschatology.

Background of Mormon Afterlife Beliefs and the Topography of the Spiritual Worlds

Before VTEs can be noted and analyzed it is important to understand the doctrinal and theological background of Mormons which is the context in which the religious experiences occur. Not all types of Mormons agree on doctrines and there is variation, but I will present here the doctrines of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints since it is the largest and most influential group, and because most VTEs' that I will examine belong to members of this

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[21] Jonathan A. Stapley, *The power of Godliness: Mormon Liturgy and Cosmology* (Oxford University Press, 2018).81.

[22] Stapley, *The Power of Godliness,* 1.

[23] Stapley, *The Power of Godliness,*7. For a full understanding of this context see also Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as It Is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (Oxford University Press, 2012).

denomination. These doctrinal themes can be identified in the VTE reports. I will give a full description of the Mormon 'heaven' which they claim is 'true' based on experience, revelation and inspiration. When people describe, write about and teach about, and hold faith in an invisible world that no one can visit, one needs to ask how they came upon this information. The Mormon faith leaders would state that doctrine is based on experience and revelation, and communication between church leaders and the divine, which is also recorded in scriptures (King James Bible, Book of Mormon, Doctrines & Covenants, etc.) and which comes from visions. Some of these visions include VTE's of influential people. The VTE's of ordinary people also play into this web of doctrine and living religion.

A Map of the Mormon Afterlife, Cosmology and Eschatology and Cultural Context

Mormon beliefs are different from most mainline Protestant and Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Christian beliefs about heaven and hell, although not divorced from some historical Greek and then Christian movements of centuries past. For example, the question of premortality, whilst ultimately rejected, was broached by Origen, who speculated that it might explain the inequalities of birth in both human and angelic societies.[24] Premortality was also considered by Plato and Augustine and later by Anglican vicar Henry Moe and the poet William Wordsworth. [25] This background is necessary for a full understanding of the Mormon theological system and how it is related to earlier systems. Indeed, Mormons claim that the Church is a Restoration of the Early Church, free from the distortions of later forms of Christianity. Another

[24] Hugh W. Nibley, *The World and the Prophets*, 3rd edition, Collected Works of Hugh Nibley 3. (Deseret Book Company, 1987), ch.26:5. https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/mi/91/.

[25] Terryl L. Givens, "Thoughts on Premortality 'The Soul, Uneasy and Confined from Home' — Plato," *Meridian Magazine*, September 8, 2010. https://latterdaysaintmag.com/article-1-6177.

factor which is essential for the reader to understand is that through its two hundred years Mormon Theology and doctrine has not remained static but evolves in what is referred to as 'Progressive revelation' through the divine inspiration received by the Living Prophets who head the Church. The fluidity and evolving nature of Mormon Theology has not left interpretations of religious experiences unaffected, however as shall be demonstrated from the data, trends, and elements of the VTE's has remained remarkably stable throughout the two centuries of reports and testimonies. This stability has remained despite the fact of continuous revelation in Mormon Theology.

Mormon doctrine shares a rejection of *creatio ex nihilo* with Platonic thought. God shapes but did not create the universe. He is subject to the eternal natural law which governs the cosmos. This reminds me of the place of Dharma in Tibetan Buddhism, where even the Buddhas are within the realm of Dharma, a natural law of how karma and all reality operate. There is a disagreement between mainstream Christianity and Newtonian physics concerning God acting in the world, although I argue that this is not a barrier in Quantum Physics. (QP) Whilst David Hume wrote a critique on miracles, which transgress the laws of science, I side with Augustine who wrote that miracles are possible.[26] One of the more influential theologians who helped shape the modern view of heaven, Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) wrote, Swedenborg writes: "The world of spirits is not far from us but is around us and with us. They can perceive our thoughts and feelings, and they are often pained by the negative emotions that we experience."[27] Only a few decades later echoed this modern Western idea Joseph Smith Jr. wrote, Joseph Smith "the

[26] David Hume, "Of miracles." *Other books by the same author* (1985): 57. Augustine, *The City of God*. (Xist Publishing, 2015). XXI. 8.2.

[27] Emanuel Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell, Translated by George F. Dole (Swedenborg Foundation, 1979).

world of spirits is not far from us, they know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and are pained within…"[28]

Let us not forget that although Spiritualism and the LDS church are very different, both emerged from the 'Burnt-over District' and share the heritage of religious freedom enshrined in American democracy. Both embraced the idea of spirit communication with the deceased. So, while the notion of a spiritual world is difficult for scientific naturalism to accept, for many humans, living in relationship to a spirit realm is considered 'normal'. Also, before reading the data, it is important to be aware that Mormon cosmology differs from mainstream Christianity. Joseph Smith Jr. preached that his church was a Restoration of the true Church from the time of Jesus and the keys of priesthood authority were given to him to pass down. [29]

There are unique aspects of the Mormon afterlife, which need to be appreciated by outsiders, which explain the context of VTEs and need to be understood and that is why I am providing such detailed background information to the data. This cosmology, which incorporates the premortal state of humans, is rather different from the mainstream Christian Churches who uphold that life starts at birth, and that after death one is assigned to heaven or hell based on one's Earthly actions and choices, or in some cases, one's beliefs or 'born again status'. The idea of a permanent hell has conflicted with the assertion of a merciful forgiving God and causes some ethical conundrums involving complex theodicies. The Mormon Theology, given its

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[28] This quotation is attributed to Joseph Smith, the founder of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He is said to have said it in a funeral sermon on October 9, 1843, in Nauvoo, Illinois, recorded in the following sources: *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith*, compiled by Joseph Fielding Smith (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1976), 326; *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*, 6:310.

[29] A good summary of Mormon afterlife beliefs is posted on the LDS main church website. Gospel Principles.ch. 41."The Postmortal Spirit World," The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2011, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-principles/chapter-41-the-postmortal-spirit-world?lang=eng.

fluidity and its openness to progression and repentance after death is certainly more compassionate and consistent with an all-loving God. [30]

Another difference between LDS/Mormon Theology and mainstream Christian is that God is not the creator of the cosmos. Matter is eternal and there is no *creatio ex nihilo*.[31] God organized but did not create matter. "Matter and spirit are not just similarly eternal; they are ultimately two manifestations of the same reality of substance."[32] Also there is no Trinity. There is Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ, whose death ensured the Atonement, and the Holy Ghost. All three are separate. Heavenly Father is not omnipotent like the mainline God of Christianity, but the emphasis is on his love for his children and role as a father. The Realms: In Mormon cosmology there are *three estates* which have been instituted by God according to the Plan of Salvation.[33] As the LDS Church website states, "This "plan" refers to the design God has employed to help us grow, learn, and experience joy. It addresses the fundamental questions "Where did we come from?" "Why are we here?" and "Where are we going?" This is also a question that appears to be answered by reading the testimonies of VTErs.

Humans have an Earthly mission to serve others and do the will of God, perhaps by raising children and giving spirits waiting for birth the chance to have Earthly parents and families. There is also continued mission work in the spirit world. It is a communal vision, the

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[30] Mormon theology has a complex attitude to death, and the term death refers not only to the physical death at the end of Earth life. There are also two types of spiritual death, which can be temporal separation or spiritual separation, and which both have resolutions. Leading a good Mormon life and then the judgement Day salvation by atonement and intercession provides resolution of separation.

[31] Givens, Terryl. *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought : Cosmos, God, Humanity*. (Oxford University Press, 2014).52. Also 2 Ne. 3:12.

[32] Givens, *Wrestling the Angel,* 57.

[33] 2 Nephi 2:5–30; 10:23–25; Alma 12:24–37; 22:12–14; 42; Moses 6:47–62. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, True to the Faith, "Plan of Salvation," 2004, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/true-to-the-faith/plan-of-salvation?lang=eng.

Also see, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Plan of Salvation," Newsroom, 2024, https://newsroom.churchofjesuschrist.org/article/plan-of-salvation.

individual fits into a community in this plan. While the individual has freedom, agency, and responsibilities the emphasis is on the family and the Mormon community and on the salvation of all children of God. The first estate is the premortal realm where we existed as children of our heavenly parents as intelligences or spirits.

After birth on Earth, we are in the second estate which includes Earth and the post Earthly spirit world.[34] The third estate is how the final states will be, when we go to our assigned realms of the celestial, terrestrial telestial realms, or perdition. Richard O. Cowan says, "Our conduct in this life will determine where and how we will continue our progression in what may be called the "third estate" or life following the resurrection and final judgment."[35]

The Three Realms

Joseph Smith and Rigdon had a Vision of Three Degrees of Glory 1832.[36] This is a foundational scripture that sets out the cosmic map of kingdoms and divine purpose and relationship with humans. There are three kingdoms of glory which are the immortal states after the resurrection: the celestial kingdom, the terrestrial kingdom, the telestial kingdom and perdition[37]. Not everyone will be resurrected at once, nor at the same time. First to be resurrected

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[34] The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Guide to the Scriptures, 2024, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/gs/second-estate?lang=eng.

[35] Richard O. Cowan, "A New Meaning of 'Restoration': The Book of Mormon on Life after Death," in The Book of Mormon: Alma, the Testimony of the Word, ed. Monte S. Nyman and Charles D. Tate Jr. (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 1992), 195–210. https://rsc.byu.edu/book-Mormon-alma-testimony-word/new-meaning-restoration. He explains that telestial is our present state but at the millennium we as mortals will become translated beings until we are resurrected in immortality.

[36] D&C 76 70-85 *A vision given to Joseph Smith the Prophet and Sidney Rigdon, at Hiram, Ohio, February 16, 1832.;also, D&C 88. See, D&C 76,* https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/76?lang=eng. Also see, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Kingdoms of Glory, 2024, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/kingdoms-of-glory?lang=eng.

[37] Dennis L. Largey, "Hell Second Death, Lake of Fire and Brimstone, and Outer Darkness," in The Book of Mormon and the Message of the Four Gospels, ed. Ray L. Huntington and Terry B. Ball (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 77–89. Also see Margaret Merrill Toscano, and Paul Toscano. *Strangers in paradox: Explorations in Mormon theology*. (Signature Books, 1990).

at the second coming of Christ[38] will be those bound for the celestial kingdom where Father and Son reign. Then there will be second and third resurrections[39] according to whether one is just or unjust and spiritual level. (D&C 2:29) At the end of the millennium will be the final judgement.[40]

The celestial kingdom is the highest of the three kingdoms of glory. The Celestial Kingdom will be literally here on a rejuvenated Earth. (This makes it differ from other types of Christians who believe that the Earth will pass away, and a heaven will exist in another dimension.) Those in this kingdom will dwell forever in the presence of God the Father and His Son Jesus Christ. Those who inherit terrestrial glory will "receive of the presence of the Son, but not of the fulness of the Father. Telestial glory will be reserved for individuals who "received not the gospel of Christ, neither the testimony of Jesus" [41] These individuals will receive their glory after being redeemed from Spirit Prison. Some people will not be worthy of dwelling in any kingdom of glory. They will be called "the sons of perdition" and will have to "abide a kingdom which is not a kingdom of glory" [42]

Bruce Dana explains that the Lord has revealed that there are three kingdoms of glory into which resurrected beings will be saved. They are the celestial, the terrestrial, and the

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[38] W. Jeffrey Marsh, "The Second Coming of Jesus," in The Book of Mormon and the Message of the Four Gospels, ed. Ray L. Huntington and Terry B. Ball (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 92–109.

[39] Keith J. Wilson, "The Resurrection: An Embattled Keystone," in The Book of Mormon and the Message of the Four Gospels, ed. Ray L. Huntington and Terry B. Ball (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 219–33.

40 Terry B. Ball, "The Final Judgment," in The Book of Mormon and the Message of the Four Gospels, ed. Ray L. Huntington and Terry B. Ball (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 1–18. Ball clarifies: "Alma taught that there will be another early judgment immediately after death to determine our place in the spirit world (see Alma 40:11–14). Abinadi suggested there must also be a type of judgment at the resurrection, for the wicked are to be resurrected after the righteous (Mosiah 15:21–26)." (Also see 2 Ne.9:15).

[41] Doctrine and Covenants 76:82.

[42] Doctrine and Covenants 76:32; 88:24. See Kingdoms of Glory, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics/kingdoms-of-glory?lang=eng.

telestial.[43] "In the celestial glory there are three heavens or degrees"[44] To goal of most Mormons is to reach the highest celestial kingdom, which requires the keeping of commandments, marriage, and other requirements to be worthy. Telestial is the destination for most individuals. Terrestrial is for sinners and evildoers. Hell, or outer darkness exists but very few people will stay there forever. Most will pass into the terrestrial kingdom. 'Sons of perdition,' are apostates and those who commit serious sins such as murder. This corresponds with the modern idea that hell is more a personal choice to reject God rather than a being imposed by God as a judgment. In 1893, President Lorenzo Snow, then president of the Quorum of the Twelve, declared in general conference his strong belief "that when the Gospel is preached to the spirits in prison, the success attending that preaching will be far greater than that attending the preaching of our Elders in this life. I believe there will be very few indeed of those spirits who will not gladly receive the Gospel when it is carried to them. The circumstances there will be a thousand times more favorable." [45]

The Plan of Salvation

There is a linear timeline to the plan of salvation in accordance with Western perspectives, although time and place do not operate on the other side of the Veil in the same way. The spirit world is here and now, just in another dimension that is not visible to us. The VTEs recorded in this dissertation refer to visits to the Spirit World. Those that have not gained merit or accepted the restored Gospel go to Spirit Prison, however apart from glimpses of this

[43] Bruce E. Dana, *Prophetic Teachings on Death, Angels, and Heavenly Manifestations* (CFI, 2011). 53. Also see D&C 76, D&C 131:1; D&C.131.
[44] D&C 131:1
[45] *Millennial Star,* 56:50.

realm, most VTEs are of the spirit world.[46] Heavenly Father lives in a higher place, the Celestial Kingdom, but some visitors to the spirit world encounter Jesus is able roam freely in the spirit world.[47] Mouritsen explains that those who did not have an opportunity in mortality to receive the gospel, and those who had a partial opportunity but rejected it will be taught. He says that in 1893, President Lorenzo Snow, then president of the Quorum of the Twelve, declared in general conference that when the Gospel is preached to the spirits in prison, the success attending that preaching will be far greater than that attending the preaching of our Elders in this life. "I believe there will be very few indeed of those spirits who will not gladly receive the Gospel when it is carried to them. The circumstances there will be a thousand times more favorable." [48]

Jesus has visited and he sends others to preach in Spirit Prison to help save them. This is like the role of the *Bodhisattva* in healing all sentient beings and leading them towards liberation from *Samsara*. The Spirit World is not heaven, but the place where the dead go whilst awaiting resurrection and connected to the realm of unborn spirits. It is the location where VTEs occur. It is an intermediate, not permanent state until the general resurrection. Heavenly Father does not reside there, but rather in the celestial kingdom.

Spirits live in the spirit world placed according to the merits of their Earthly lives, hence the hierarchy reflected in the data stories. It is located close by as Joseph Smith Jr. pointed out. During a funeral sermon, he said that the righteous spirits "are exalted to a greater and more glorious work; hence they are blessed in their departure to the world of spirits. Enveloped in

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[46] Alma 40:11. "that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life."

[47] See Dale C. Mouritsen, "The Spirit World, Our Next Home." *Ensign, January* (1977). https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1977/01/the-spirit-world-our-next-home?lang=eng.

[48] *Millennial Star* 56:50.; Dale C. Mouritsen, "The Spirit World, Our Next Home." *Ensign, January* (1977).

flaming fire, they are not far from us." [49] J. Smith taught that the spirit has always been immortal.[50] He spoke, "the world of spirits is not far from us, they know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and are pained within…" [51] The taught that the worlds are of the most perfect order and harmony. [52] He also spoke of angels without wings and persons who are more advanced in knowledge than spirits.[53] Joseph Smith, Brigham Young and other leaders often spoke about the spirit world. Alma 40 is full of information about the other realms and cosmology and humans' place in it.

The resurrection of Jesus is the cornerstone of the Plan of Salvation because it is through His Atonement and resurrection that all humans can be resurrected. The Mormon afterlife is physical and progresses in a linear timeline, whereas the Tibetan afterlife is cyclical, and reincarnation involves receiving a new body in the rebirth. Both systems uphold the idea that the mental is paramount and then expressed and experienced through some kind of body. This relationship between spirit and body varies at different moments whether before , during or after Earth life, but there is always a link. Sometime this link is based on a personal identity (Mormon) and sometimes karmic (Tibetan).

Spiritual beings and the Spirit World

Now, concerning the state of the soul between death and the resurrection Brigham Young remarked:

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[49] *JS, Discourse,* Nauvoo*, Hancock Co., IL, 9 Oct. 1843; in* Times and Seasons, *15 Sept. 1843, 4:331–332. (JS means the Joseph Smith Papers),* https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-9-october-1843-as-reported-by-times-and-seasons/1.

[50] D&C 93:29 https://rsc.byu.edu/let-us-reason-together/first-principles-man-are-self-existent-god

[51] The Times and seasons October 9th, 1843.

[52] *JS, Discourse,* Nauvoo*, Hancock Co., IL, 9 Oct. 1843; in* Times and Seasons, *15 Sept. 1843, 4:331–332. (JS means the Joseph Smith Papers),* https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/discourse-9-october-1843-as-reported-by-times-and-seasons/1.

[53] Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith, 162. Joseph Smith Foundation, "Angels (Teachings of Joseph Smith)", 2024, https://josephsmithfoundation.org/teachings/angels.

> Behold, it has been made known unto me by an angel, that the spirits of all men, as soon as they are departed from this mortal body, yea, the spirits of all men, whether they be good or evil, are taken home to that God who gave them life. And then shall it come to pass, that the spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest, a state of peace, where they shall rest from all their troubles and from all care, and sorrow.[54]

President Brigham Young taught that the postmortal spirit world is on the Earth, around us, [55] and confirmed that the spirit world "is on this Earth."[56] President Ezra Taft Benson declared that "the spirit world is not far away. Sometimes the Veil between this life and the life beyond becomes very thin. Our loved ones who have passed on are not far from us."[57] There are stories and VTEs, about being in the Temple and being aware of deceased ancestors or receiving guidance in the Celestial room. [58]

Another key concept reflected in the VTEs that is absent from mainline Christianity is the belief in the premortal realm, where humans live before their incarnation on Earth. Souls choose their parents according to promises made before birth. This idea is reflected in the accounts of spirit children, especially those recounted by Sarah Hinze. Interestingly in Tibetan Buddhism the idea of a Bardo Being choosing the womb of the mother is encountered in the *Bardo Thödol*. This idea also appears in certain New Age theologies where the theme is choosing to incarnate on Earth to learn lessons, like in a school, before returning to the real home on the other side. Mormonism refutes reincarnation, and its 'timeline' is linear rather than cyclical, however it is unusual to find this doctrine in the West. It makes perfect sense to me as a

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[54] Alma 40:11-12.
[55] see Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young. 1997, 279.
[56] *Discourses of Brigham Young.* 376.
[57] *Ensign,* June 1971.33.
[58] My son performed 'baptism for the dead' by proxy and by 'chance' received the names of actual ancestors that had randomly been assigned to him. Noone knew his Scottish genealogy. Was it chance or workings and influences from beyond the Veil? The answer depends on one's faith position.

mother, who found comfort in believing that a miscarried child returned in a later pregnancy. However, this is a faith position, not an academic argument. Science would of course disagree.

Keeping in mind the centrality of family and the Mormon community, which is reflected in the VTEs, other aspects of Church life are recounted in the data. Many accounts refer to Ordinances, genealogy, and Temple work: People often due without completing ordinances or endowments. Non-Mormons are in needs of baptism and the benefits of subsequent Temple work. This is why Temple rituals such as baptism by proxy and genealogy work are conducted in Family History centers, to help those in the spirit world progress. When work is done for the on Earth, they can choose to accept it on the other side. Marriage and compete ordinances are required for exaltation to the celestial kingdom in the future. Marriage in mainline Christianity is 'til death do us part' but in Mormon Theology the goal is to continue the relationship and to appear on the other side of the Veil with one's compete extended family. Ordinances and sealings in the Temple are part of the process to bring this about. Mormon couples who have been married in a Mormon Temple, have had their marriage sealed for eternity. Ordinances can be 'done for the dead' by proxy. This explains the need for genealogical work, to find ancestors and do the ordinances for them. Their spirits in the spirit world have agency to accept or reject the proxy work done in their names.

There are other philosophical and theological correlates to the elements of VTEs. These will be discussed in the next chapter. It is necessary to understand these theological positions and ideas one reads through the VTE testimonies and data in the appendices which mention the different realms, the importance of marriage and the family, and the varieties of church work. A second reason why I am outlining this background theology is to establish the link between Earthly culture and how it is mirrored in the afterlife descriptions. It was important to point out

this cosmology briefly to provide a setting for the VTEs in the next chapter. It is important to remember that although the VTEs speak for themselves they are interpreted in the light of this theology and context is important. When approaching the analysis this context weighs into the question of assessing how much of the VTE expresses agreement or disagreement with the Mormon doctrine. Most of the VTEs do in fact express or agree with these doctrinal ideas, especially those described in the book of Alma. The question to bear in mind is how prior belief and the otherworldly experience interplay, and what this suggests about the reality and nature of the experience. Just because people see what they expect does not necessarily mean that the experience is imagined. The phenomenon is too complex to assume this without deep and open-minded investigation.

All these Mormon doctrines that involve the whole sweep of existence explain the mindset of Mormons who had VTEs. On their deathbeds many Mormons expected to see the Spirit World that they experienced. They were prepared and ready to cross the Veil. Most Mormons would explain VTEs in terms of this theology and would not require and outside explanation.

Mormon VTE Studies and Mormon Literature Review

LDS scholarship has often categorized VTE's in the niche of Folklore Studies. In common parlance folklore is taken to mean that some traditional genre of story is not true, but 'made-up' by simple folk. Stories of fairies, elves, dragons etc. are put into this category and dismissed. This is unfortunately because folklore stories contain truths and some, such as alien abduction, could arguably be in the realm of possibility. I prefer not to put VTEs into this category for this reason. The academic category of folklore is more sophisticated than this

popular culture approach. Famous academics such as William A. Wilson, Austin and Atla Fife, and Eric A. Eliason. [59] W. Paul Reeve and Michael Van Wagenen argue that Joseph Smith "created an "open and spiritually rich cosmology" in which the Mormon people found "ample room" to develop a variety of supernatural legends."[60] They discuss the problematic distinction between superstition and rational scientific minds, which results from the polarity in reactions to extraordinary folklore stories.

It is I think important when reading the VTEs in this dissertation, to be aware of this polarity and to not fall into the trap of talking sides and judging their veracity in terms of a secular worldview. Simply being aware of one's situatedness and biases, and reading the testimonies at face value without judgement, letting the stories speak for themselves first, is important. What is more, while Joseph Smith's cosmology might be considered as supernatural by some, others consider it real and take it literally, and their position deserves respect. For in the final outcome, the Otherworlds are a mystery, and there is no definitive proof one way or the other as to their real or actual existence, it is a matter of faith and spiritual interpretation.[61]

In this dissertation I will not take a folklore perspective when analyzing the VTEs but rather use the lens of Religious Studies and Theology which allows for both a natural and supernatural interpretation. For while VTE narratives, as a form of folklore, have passed down generations and been shared in society, they can also be examined through the theological lens of

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[59] William A. Wilson, "Mormon Folklore," *BYU Studies* 33:3, 2024, 521-40, https://byustudies.byu.edu/article/Mormon-folklore-cut-from-the-marrow-of-everyday-experience/.

[60] W. Paul Reeve and Michael Scott Van Wagenen, eds. Between Pulpit and Pew: The Supernatural World in Mormon History and Folklore. (Utah State University Press, 2011), 3.

[61] See The Problem of Verification in John Hick's Philosophy of Religion. 95-6. VTEs could be regarded as an example of Anthony Flew's 'bliks'. (an unverifiable and unfalsifiable interpretation of one's experience.) 98.

religious experience.[62] At least in the case of Mormon VTEs, the experiencers did have faith and belief in the veracity of divine intervention, miracles and the Otherworlds. Eliane Thatcher noted that folklore stories are without full meaning unless seen in their Mormon context,[63] and I would agree that Mormon VTEs must both be seen in their context and also later, compared to those religious experiences of a similar sort in other religious or secular contexts. As Eric A. Eliason and Tom Mould expressed: "To know Mormons from early Mormon folklore studies is to know a people who encounter the supernatural daily in dramatic visions, dreams, and revelations,"[64] They note the importance that visionary experiences, promptings of the spirit, and messages being delivered by ancestors are part and parcel of their religious heritage.[65] They also stress the huge role that the supernatural has played in Mormon culture.[66] They mentioned that Theology and Religious Studies focused mostly on, ritual and scriptural texts, and therefore argued that folklore is a discipline suited for the religious practices of ordinary people.

Nowadays however, Theology and Religious Studies do focus very much on lived religion in all its everyday forms. VTEs are a personal and intense form of lived religion, and these and other lived personal experiences give life to what would otherwise be a dry faith. This is not to detract from the valuable academic contribution of folklore, and its excellent scholarship. However, in the past many theologians and religious studies scholars have neglected Mormon Studies and it is wonderful to see more interfaith and interdisciplinary work being carried out today.

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[62] After the 1970's "personal experience narratives as a viable genre of folklore" said Tom Mould and Eric Eliason. Eric A. Eliason and Tom Mould, eds. Latter-day Lore: Mormon Folklore Studies (University of Utah Press, 2013), 5.

[63] Reeve, *Between Pulpit and Pew,* x.

[64] Eric A. Eliason, and Tom Mould. *Latter-day Lore: Mormon Folklore Studies* (University of Utah Press, 2013), 5.

[65] Eliason, *Latter Day Lore*, 15.

[66] Eliason, *Latter Day Lore*, 177-178.

The LDS church places a high value on truth. After most testimonies given in church meetings the speaker will often end with the phrase 'that this church is true.' Much controversy surrounds the 'truth' of VTEs, especially in the modern secular world. This dissertation cannot and will not attempt to argue for their literal veracity. There is no scientific proof either way to establish if what is seen in these visions is 'real' or imaginary. I would argue that these experiences are real for the experiencer and directly influence and change their lives and that taking a different perspective, by simply listening to their stories with an open mind is more fruitful. As an academic it is important to document and analyze the genre of VTEs, and to let the contents of the VTE's speak for themselves in a phenomenological manner. We might ask questions about the patterns and their implications. We might note that some sources are perhaps more trustworthy than others, and some appear to be embellished. However reserving judgment is part of understanding their religious context and the valuable part they play in bolstering faith.

The Literacy and Literary Culture of Mormons Especially in the 19th Century

Mormon custom to write down events and spiritual impressions in journals that passed down the family. The revelation of the Golden Plates and the translation of the Book of Mormon and other sacred texts balances the union of revealed text and heavenly vision are the beginning of the Mormon church. Both writing and lived experiences are significant and depend on one another. Impressions of the Holy Ghost and visions were written down in spiritual journals. Some still exist today and are held by families or in Church libraries. The literacy and literary culture of Mormons especially in the 19th century is well known. Mormon society encouraged record keeping and this extended to the level of the individual. It was very common for people to write down events and spiritual impressions in journals, which were subsequently passed down

the family. Keeping a personal journal full of spiritual impressions and even visionary experiences was common and these written sources were handed down to later generations. Mormons love to read devotional literature, and many magazine publications and testimonial faith-based books feed a vibrant market and social media videos, podcasts and blogs serve to cement the already close communities. Mormonism's success might stem from the strong American strain of individualism with the even stronger emphasis on belonging to a community.

The LDS community often describes members are either active or not active based on the amount of community participation and efforts put forth in fulfilling their social callings. Membership is more than mere belief, it is living a full church lifestyle and while a robust doctrine and theology exists at one end, offering practical and supportive help and neighborliness is just as valued at the other. While most of this dissertation will focus on the more esoteric and intangible aspects of religious experience, so much of Mormon life is expressed in canning and food storage, potlucks, adhering to the word of wisdom and modesty, visiting and other social activities. Daily reading of scripture, prayer, and listening to the promptings of the spirit motivate this holistic lifestyle. Books, reading, journaling and record keeping have always been an important part of Mormon culture and the written word has always been part of missionary resources and Church growth and communications culture.

In the 19th century Mormons journalled and wrote and published a great deal of material in the form of journals and magazines, books, letters and spiritually based memoirs, which is now held in libraries and private homes. Mormon bookshops offer many genres for all age groups and interests. Titles such as "My Redeemer Lives: Personal accounts of our Savior by Jean Hawley published in 2007 is an example of a popular genre, and it is published by one of the many Mormon publishers, the Spring Creek Book Company. Cedar Fort, Common Consent

Press, BCC Press, and Deseret Books, which acquired Bookcraft and Covenant Communications are other large Mormon Publishing houses. These are all outside the enormous amount of materials published by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints itself, much of which is made available as open access online. My data in this dissertation is found in such sources, and such is their number that it is impossible to be comprehensive. There are many more examples of 'Veil thinning' religious experiences that are 'undiscovered' or unpublished. However, I selected as many as I could find and that reflect the 19th, 20th and 21st centuries in as many modes of publication as possible, both in print and digital.

Lundahl and Widdison noted that Mormons are encouraged to share and record significant events affecting them and their families. Their journals reveal have a rich NDE tradition. They added that "Mormons tend to parallel their religious beliefs in both content and interpretation." [67] They also mention that given the small size of the Mormon community a significantly large amount of such reports has existed before Raymond Moody, a significant point noticed by Moody and Elizabeth Kubler Ross (personal communication 1980).[68] My data is evidence that the essential aspects of the experience of the afterlife were written down and communicated in the 19th century, over a hundred years before Moody picked up on the topic. Whilst the label *NDE* is from the 1970s, the phenomenon which gave rise to it has existed in early Mormon accounts, and indeed I argue throughout all human history. Also, people unaware of the phenomenon have had the experience, and even had their beliefs overturned by experiencing something they thought could not exist, as is the case with Eben Alexander M.D. When reading the data it is important for the reader not to bring their own biases to the material,

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[67] Craig R Lundahl, and Harold A Widdison. "Social Positions in the City of Light." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 4 (1993):232-3.

[68] Lundahl, Social Positions, 232.

and to be aware of their own beliefs and situatedness, and to read it at face value before coming to conclusions.

Literature review - LDS Scholars and Writers

> Ye worlds of light and life, beyond the sphere; mysterious country! Let your light appear. Ye angels, life the Veil, the truth unfolds, And give our Seers a glimpse of that bright world; Tell where ye live? [69]

It is important to introduce Mormon scholar in the field of Near-Death Studies because many of their names and worlds are not known outside the discipline of Mormon studies and many remain unknown in wider NDE circles. This is not unexpected given that until recently, Mormon studies concerning religion has not been well accepted nor taken seriously by theologians and the rest of academia, and more generally The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints is still greeted with suspicion by more orthodox and conservative Christian institutions. It is also one reason why Mormon religious experiences have remained largely unexplored by mainstream academic researchers. Mormons have been documenting and sharing their religious experiences for almost two centuries.

Mormons who have published on the topic of VTEs, mostly in the late 20th century and early 2000s, include Ray R. Canning (1920-1994), Duane Swofford Crowther (1934-), Craig R. Lundahl (1943-2017), and Harold A. Widdison (1935-12), Lee Nelson, Arvin Gibson (1924-2004), Marlene Bateman Sullivan, Sarah Hinze, Brent Top, Martin Tanner, Daniel C. Peterson, Jeff O'Driscoll, and Jeffery C Olsen, John W. Welch, Lee Nelson, Robert L. Millet, Neal A. Maxwell.[70] In understanding VTEs and before I can write my own impression of them, I need to

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[69] Parley P. Pratt "The World of Spirits" in Key to the Science of Theology, Ch. 14, 128.
[70] Former member of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles.

understand what experts have written about them before, so that I can develop their arguments. It is indeed unfortunate that Lundahl and Widdison passed away prematurely, and that no-one has taken up such a prominent academic research role in the field since. More recent books tend to be aimed at ordinary people rather than the academy, which reflects how the field is becoming an accepted part of popular culture, though still resisted and not accepted by serious academics.

Main Scholars

Ray R. Canning (1920-1994), Duane Swofford Crowther (1934-), Dr. Craig R. Lundahl (Western New Mexico. 1943-2017), Dr. Harold A. Widdison (Professor Emeritus of Medical Sociology NAU (1935-2012)[71], Marlene Bateman Sullivan, Dr. Brent Top, Lee Nelson, and Arvin S. Gibson are LDS academics and writers who have published on the topic of VTEs, mostly in the late 20th century and early 2000s. Today Mormon academia does not focus on this area, especially since Canning, Lundahl and Widdison passed away. The more modern voices utilize conference, social media and video platform arenas to broadcast their work, rather than books. Martin Tanner M.D. has a radio show[72] and podcast and Jeffrey Olson often collaborates with him, Daniel Peterson gives lectures and writes a few online magazine articles. I met all three at the 2022 IANDS conference in Salt Lake City. I also met Sarah Hinze, the author of several books focusing on children in premortal life, and a DVD documentary, Remembering Heaven, which was released last year. She is one of only two prominent women authors in the

[71] At NAU in the 70s he established a groundbreaking course on Death Grief and Bereavement, one of the first in the UDSA in this area. The Need for Proper Research Methods and Techniques and LDS Sociologist views the NDE in Craig R. Lundahl, *A Collection of Near-Death Research Readings*. (Nelson-Hall, 1982). Harold Widdison, *Trailing Clouds of Glory: First Person Glimpses into Premortality* (Cedar Fort, 2011).

[72] KSL Television & Radio. Religion Today Show, broadcast twice each Sunday on KSL Radio, 2024, https://kslpodcasts.com/podcast/religion-today/.

field, along with Marlene Bateman Sullivan. It is vital to appreciate Mormon scholarship and their opinions about afterlife experiences, in order to form my own position.

The most academically qualified and prolific writer would have to be Lundahl and since his death the world has lost a great scholar and researcher in this area, and his work has not been taken up by his students. This explains the dearth of such research today at a university level, although the popular social media world output is flourishing.

Ray R. Canning

Ray R. Canning not only wrote the first LDS article in the discipline of Near-Death Studies as a young man in 1965, but he approached it from a non-faith position which is indicative of the barriers LDS authors had in reaching a non-LDS audience and gaining acceptance from the wider academic community. It was easier to wear one hat to write about sociology and another in their private life in the Church. His book My Continuing Quest 1996 contains he much earlier 1965 article.[73] As well as identifying elements of the VTEs a decade before Raymond Moody, and others, he also was interested in a cross-cultural comparison which was well before his time in terms of Comparative Theology, and he tries to tackle the conundrums of universalism and perennialism via a vis VTEs. As a sociologist he is careful to place Mormon VTEs in their cultural and historical contexts. He established that religious experiences such as NDEs do correspond with cultural differences, and he posited possible explanations for this. He added a sociological lens to his own faith lens to this phenomenon.

Duane S. Crowther

[73] Ray R. Canning, *Mormon Return-From-The-Dead Stories, Fact or Folklore* (UT Academy, 1965). Ray Russell Canning, and Stan Larson. *My Continuing Quest: Sociological Perspectives on Mormonism* (Freethinker Press, 1996).

Many LDE members are familiar with the inspirational, faith-based, and detailed examination of VTEs written by Duane S. Crowther called *Life Everlasting* (1967) which is one of the very first systematic, well-organized analysis of the VTE phenomenon published well before Moody.[74] This book is well known and considered inspirational in Mormon communities. Crowther's work generally stayed within theological topics but in 2012 he wrote another book focusing on the end times and prophetic warnings of the future and another book about the afterlife.[75] It is not uncommon for VTE narratives in this genre to discuss not just personal individual salvation, with ideas of the universal salvation of humankind, and the trajectory of the future for human life as a whole, which indeed is not surprising in terms of Christian eschatological beliefs about final judgement and resurrection.

Most Mormons I talk to about VTEs reference *Life Everlasting* as a good place to start as it is popular and influential within the community, although not well known outside it. The book was written in 1967 and is one of the first books of its genre which appeared years before the term NDE became well known indicating that VTEs were taken seriously in Mormon communities long before the greater American culture became receptive or aware of the narratives. His book is divided into topic sections with references to VTEs to illustrate the themes. He begins by describing and analyzing the nature of the Spirit World and Entry into it, and reunion with loved ones. Then he discusses factors influencing man's time of death, with can be altered. He describes paradise and discusses the death of children. Then he talks about the spirits of the dead visiting the Earth in angelic form to give counsel and comfort or escort the dying through the Veil of death. He talks about hell and links this realm to those spirits who

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[74] Duane S. Crowther, *Life Everlasting* (Bookcraft, 1967).

[75] Duane S. Crowther, *Inspired Prophetic Warnings: Book of Mormon and Modern Prophecies About America's Future* (Horizon, 2012).

followed Satan in rebellion against Heavenly Father and how at the second resurrection mortal in hell can end spirits can progress to a higher level. He discusses Spirit Prison and how Temple work helps those who reside there. He ends his book discussing the Resurrection, Final Judgement, the Three Degrees of Glory and Exaltation. Crowther states his purpose in writing this book saying "It is a careful analysis of the experiences of dozens of reliable individuals who have died and then returned to life, and of scores of others who have been visited by departed spirits. It is a gathering together of revelation after revelation telling of the glorious life which awaits the righteous." He personally gives witness to this faith in an afterlife and the continuation of individuality. [76]He also believes that these experiences, had by worthy eyewitness Church members, are in harmony with the scriptures and hence validate them. Just as he accepts the church as 'true' he accepts VTEs as 'true.' Crowther is to be commended in writing one of the first comprehensive collections of VTEs, even if he stayed within a theological perimeter.

For Mormons, and indeed Crowther, VTEs are personal revelations which are keys to sacred knowledge, and he also holds that God on his part, reaches out and reveals the knowledge to worthy seekers. It was the loss of his daughter to cancer that spurred his quest to understand the afterlife, and motivated him to write on this topic, not just for his comfort but for the comfort of others. His book is traditional in that it quotes Mormon scriptures and features the experiences of important Mormon leaders. It contains 133 testimonies from both famous and lesser-known individuals, which can be found at the end of the book called "Summary of Supernatural Manifestations cited. (382-392) His doctrinal index also lists some features of the VTEs such as languages used in the spirit world. (393)

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[76] I think that this contrasts with the extinguishing of individuality in Tibetan Buddhism and merging with the Clear Light.

Craig R. Lundahl and Harold A. Widdison

Craig R. Lundahl and Harold A. Widdison are two of the most prominent LDS academics who contributed greatly to NDE research. Both Lundahl and Widdison were primarily sociologists, the former a Professor at Western New Mexico University and the latter a Professor at NAU in Northern Arizona. Thus, they shared Canning's approach using their discipline's tool to examine how VTEs functioned in society. Lundahl, the more prolific writer of the two in this area, wrote eleven major articles mostly for the JNDS and two of them were with Widdison and one with Gibson. Widdison did not write stand-alone books but contributed research to publications with Lundahl such as *The Eternal Journey* (1997). This title, along with *A Collection of Near-Death Research Readings*. (1982) are what I would consider the LDS 'textbooks' in the field of Mormon Near-Death Studies. Significantly Lundahl's 1982 book, just mentioned, contains a forward by Raymond A. Moody, cementing the connection in the emerging field, and only a few years after Moody's groundbreaking book *'Life After Life* (1975). In 1976 Moody ironically came to Salt Lake City to talk about his new book on the radio but he was preaching to the choir. Those who heard him on the radio were already familiar with the tradition of Deathbed visions and communication with the Spirit World. Coincidentally, the local Mormons had already read that month something similar, an article published in the *Ensign*, the Church's official magazine, titled "The Spirit World, Our Next Home."[77] Lundahl's major

[77] Brent L. Top, "The Near-Death Experience: Why Latter-day Saints Are So Interested," in *Life Beyond the Grave: Christian Interfaith Perspectives*, ed. Alonzo L. Gaskill and Robert L. Millet (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2019), 91–112; Dale C. Mouritsen, "The Spirit World, Our Next Home," *Ensign*, January 1977, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/1977/01/the-spirit-world-our-next-home?lang=eng.

articles were published between 1981 1982, 1992, 1997, 1999,2000.[78] It is a great loss to the field that Lundahl and Widdison are no longer living, and even more tragic that few took up their studies to continue them.

A collection of Near-Death Research Readings is a multi-author text featuring contributions from other eminent academics in the field such as Michael Grosso, Erlendur Haraldsson, Karlis Osis,[79] Jenneth Ring and Michael Sabom, as well as Harold A. Widdison. It contains philosophical, psychological, historical, medical, scientific and cross-cultural observations about deathbed experiences and VTEs. This inter disciplinary approach is a strength, and necessary in what Lundahl explains as a book that "explores a new territory, the subjective experiences of persons near physical death."[80] In Chapter one Widdison references the long-time struggle between science and religion in understanding reality, and the observation that cultural differences are apparent between reports.[81] He challenges the assumption that the

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[78] Craig R. Lundahl, "Angels in Near-Death Experiences." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 1 (1992): 49-56.

Craig R Lundahl, and Arvin S. Gibson. "Near-Death Studies and Modern Physics." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 18, no. 3 (2000): 143-179.

Craig R Lundahl, & Widdison, H. A. (1983). The Mormon Explanation of Near-Death Experiences. *Anabiosis: Journal of Near-Death Studies*, *3*(2), 97-106.

Craig R Lundahl, *The Near-Death Experiences of Mormons.* Paper presented at the American Psychological Association convention, New York, September 1979.

Craig R Lundahl, *A Collection of Near-Death Research Readings*. Chicago: Nelson-Hall. 1982.

Craig R Lundahl, and Harold A. Widdison. The Eternal Journey: How Near-Death Experiences Illuminate our Earthly Lives. Warner Books, 1997.

Craig R Lundahl, "Parallels Between Near-Death Experience Prophetic Visions and Prophecies from the Bible and Mormon Holy Writ." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 17, no. 3 (1999): 193-203.

Craig R Lundahl, "The perceived other world in Mormon near-death experiences: A Social and Physical Description." *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying* 12, no. 4 (1982): 319-327.

Craig R Lundahl, and Harold A. Widdison. "Social Positions in the City of Light." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 4 (1993): 231-238.

[79] Harlis Osis, and Erlendur Haraldsson. *What They Saw ... at the Hour of Death*. 3rd ed. Hasting House, 1977. Psychologists Osis, a Latvian and Haraldsson, from Iceland, conducted a study of hundreds of terminally ill patients in India and the USA and documented their spiritual experiences.

[80] Craig R Lundahl, *Collection of Near-Death,* xii. Heim, Albert. *Remarks on Fatal Falls.* Yearbook of the Swiss Alpine Club. 1892.

[81] Craig R Lundahl. *A Collection of Near-Death Research Readings* (Nelson-Hall. 1982), 3, 5.

existence cultural differences in VTE reports means they can be dismissed as self-induced illusions based on one's expectations.[82]This tension has bogged down discussion about these experiences into two camps which argue whether or not the experiences really occurred as described, and whether they are 'real' or imagined. Obviously, there is no answer to this conundrum, for like so much in this area what cannot be proved cannot be disproved.

In Lundahl's Chapter he discusses eleven Mormon VTEs between 1938 and 1976. He acknowledges the work of Canning before him and the fact that, as believers in the afterlife, Mormons are receptive to this topic. [83] In his discussion he reports finding certain prevalent elements in the experiences and says they are like elements discovered in non-Mormon analyses, e.g., being out of body, meeting others, cities of light, and experiences of coming back. He notices that older reports focus on larger events rather than small fine details. [84] "Among the Mormon subjects, there was a tendency to describe their near-death experiences in terminology similar to their subcultural group and to describe various social phenomena in terms of their own cultural conditioning." [85] This is also what I also have observed and will illustrate later in this dissertation. He argues that we see what we are trained to see and since Mormons live in organizational and family structures it is understandable when they see these same structures in their 'afterlife experiences'.[86] At the end of this book Lundahl tries to offer various hypotheses and explanations for NDEs and discusses ideas for innovative directions of study in the field. Forty years later we are no closer to having an answer.

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[82] Lundahl, *Collection of Near-Death,* 5.
[83] Lundahl, *Collection of Near-Death,* 166.
[84] Lundahl, *Collection of Near-Death,* 176.
[85] Lundahl, *Collection of Near-Death,* 177.
[86] Lundahl, *Collection of Near-Death,* 177.

In his second major book with Widdison written 15 years later, The Eternal Journey 1997, Lundahl dives deeper to give a definition and depth analysis of NDEs, details of their components, and traits. He tackles the process of the dying experience and then introduces a spiritual framework which includes the pre-mortal life, the purpose of life, spirit children, the nature of the spirit body, the city of light, life in the spirit world, and descriptions of the otherworldly realms and its inhabitants. The forward is written by Melvin Morse M.D., himself a respected figure in the field. Lundahl poses the ultimate questions as the first sentence of the book: "What is the purpose of life and the meaning of death?" This is the crux of the matter, the human quest for understanding our place in the cosmos, and Lundahl rightly sees birth and death as part of a human journey, not just on the individual but on the collective level. [87] His book does not merely repeat his earlier book, bringing in other academic authors such as Sabom and Ring, but fleshes it out, and sets it out in a theological setting as a spiritual journey, in which the VTE is a transition between Earthly and heavenly life. He introduces the complementary work of LDS writer Arvin Gibson.

He suggests an 'ideal' NDE experience, and his book contains many other narratives that he thinks "can enlighten us about the reality, purposes, and meaning of life and death." [88] I think that this is an important switch here from mere description and academic hypothesizing, so taking the words of experience seriously. It represents a switch in authority from the lofty heights of the opinions of experts and those with academic qualifications, to listening to the voice of the ordinary person. While the learned dispute and argue, the voice of experiencers comes across loud and clear and has something to teach the listener. While the reality of their narratives cannot

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[87] Lundahl, *Collection of Near-Death*, 1.

[88] Craig R. Lundahl, and Harold A. Widdison. *The Eternal Journey: How Near-Death Experiences Illuminate Our Earthly Lives* (Warner Books, 1997), 9,11.

be proven, perhaps this is not the point, the point that scientists miss, which is that by studying death we can all learn about life and our life purpose. That is of ultimate value. I too agree that the study is NDEs and VTEs is not just about the truth or reality of the experience, but the message the experiencers convey of great importance to us in our lives, and so some, of deep spiritual significance. For this reason, the study of VTEs cannot be dismissed. The message of unconditional live, a purpose to life and an eternal journey beyond death, is for Lundahl, paramount.[89]

Lundahl's article "A Nonscience Forerunner to Modern Near-Death Studies in America." Published in *Omega - Journal of Death and Dying* is a valuable article discussing the VTE phenomenon from the time of the Prophet Joseph Smith onward, his teachings on death, and Church teachings on this topic. It focuses on the Biblical and doctrinal understandings of death that Mormons were familiar with, especially in the 19th century.[90] He concludes that although Mormon death experiences informed Mormons about death and affirmed their doctrines, he does not think the doctrines gave origin to the experiences.[91]

Lundahl is perhaps the most prolific academic writer on VTEs. He devoted his life to this topic, and it is a great loss that he has passed away. He is one of the earliest writers to ask penetrating questions linking NDEs to Physics and looking outside the 'Mormon box' in seeking explanations.[92] Since he was not a scientist, he was not held back from discussing topics such as Angels, and yet he opened up subsequent discussions beyond the merely theological.

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[89] Lundahl, *Eternal Journey*, 268-9.

[90] Craig R. Lundahl, "A Nonscience Forerunner to Modern Near-Death Studies in America." *Omega - Journal of Death and Dying* 28, no. 1 (1994): 63–78.

[91] Lundahl, *Nonscience Forerunner*, 63–78.

[92] Lundahl, Craig R., and Arvin S. Gibson. "Near-Death Studies and Modern Physics." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 18, no. 3 (2000): 143-179.

Harold A Widdison

Harold A. Widdison did not write his own separate book until 2012 when he published *Trailing Clouds of Glory: First Person Glimpses into Premortality.* [93] This is one of the first books in Near-Death Studies to involve the Mormon view of the pre-mortal, pre-birth experience, a perspective on the linear timeline of human existence that most Christians do not consider. In the modern West popular wisdom usually assumes that life begins at birth or sometime in the womb, and that life ends at death, after which the secular assert life ends, and the religious assert there is an afterlife or reincarnation, depending on their faith. The idea that the Earthly life is in the middle of an eternal immortal existence is a minority view, but one that makes sense, and one that must be understood if one is to fully appreciate Mormon VTEs.

I had an experience of coming to this Earth from the spirit world, and experience remembered since early childhood, and whose details were brought up in my patriarchal a blessing and in past life regression, a feeling of gently falling through the upper atmosphere, through the stratosphere and the clouds, leaving behind white clothed throngs of my beloved friends and family. Widdison introduces and acknowledges other LDS writers in the field such as Sarah Hinze and Arvin Gibson. His text contains many personal narratives, many from children and most from Mormon sources, which he classifies as NDEs, Pre-Birth Memories/Experiences, Nearing Death Awareness, Deathbed Visions and After Death Communications ADCs. He stresses themes such as descriptions of a heavenly home, the inhabitants there, The Being of Light. He discusses activities such as teaching and learning, the escorting of spirits to and from Earth, angels watching over Earth, keeping records, working, serving on councils, and

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[93] Harold A. Widdison, *Trailing Clouds of Glory: First Person Glimpses into Premortality* (Horizon, 2004).

relationships there. The appearance of premortal beings and the spirit world.[94] Assignments and missions our covenant with God and saying goodbye to return to Earth. He explains how children choose their parents and the journey to come to Earth. He describes children's memories of their heavenly home and their innate abilities they bring. Strangely he reports that the babies bring their names with them and how parents are made aware of these names.[95]

Next, he discusses the deceased as angelic protectors of the living on Earth. He discusses parents visiting their unborn children. How spirit children might choose their children through adoption. He describes death as returning home.[96] This book is obviously written from a faith perspective, but it is well structured, and the voices of the experiences come across so that their experiences speak for themselves. He played in important role in challenging the typical Western assumption that life begins at birth. It does not occur to many non-Mormon writers in this genre that humans might be immortal before birth.

Lee Nelson (Leland R.)

Lee Nelson, educated at BYU, is well known for his four part *Beyond the Veil* Series (1988-) and for his later book *Visions from Beyond the Veil.(2014)* He aims to reach a popular audience with each chapter devoted to a different personal narrative drawn from Mormon sources.[97] In his introduction to Beyond the Veil Book One he refers to the reservoir of beyond the Veil experiences in Utah that in 1988 were hardly know outside the state, even by Raymond Moody, who according to Nelson, only scratched the surface.[98] Nelson was aided by the well-known publisher in this genre, Cedar Fort publishing and he found many beyond the Veil stories

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[94] Widdison, *Trailing Clouds.* Location, 142, 603,648, 669,689, 935.
[95] Widdison, *Trailing Clouds* Location, 967,967,1122,1142,1177,1719,1777,2226,2433,2516, 2536.
[96] Widdison, *Trailing Clouds* Location, 3851,4502,5170, 5569.
[97] Only Arthur Ford's narrative is not Mormon.
[98] Lee Nelson , *Visions from Beyond the Veil* v.4. (Cedar Fort, 2014),1-7.

when he started looking for them in Utah. He states that many refused to have their sacred experiences published but others felt their experiences could bring private comfort to many. In Beyond the Veil Book One he recounts nineteen stories from persons of all genders and all ages throughout the 20th century. Nelson uses the term beyond the Veil experiences, like my VTE label, because the narratives are not limited to a one way after death scenario but include visits from those in the spirit world to the Earthly realm. It is two-way traffic so to speak. Lee reflects that he noticed common elements in the narratives such as coming out of body and autoscopy from above, being invisible to the living that one observes and hears in an out of body state, the ability to pass through solid walls, being greeted by deceased relatives and escorts, a tunnel, a green valley, a large door, a room, and glimpses of other areas of the spirit world, a life review, telepathic communication and being sent back because the time is too soon and the mission is incomplete on Earth. Then there is the pain that returns when the spirit reenters the body.[99]All those he interviewed lost their fear of death.[100] In Visions from Beyond the Veil he keeps the same format offering 68 stories, which include all but three of those from Beyond the Veil Book One. His writing is aimed at ordinary people for use as personal and private spiritual devotion, for comfort and inspiration.[101] His popular books opened up the Mormon tradition to outsiders and helped in the sharing of religious experiences to the wider world.

Arvin S. Gibson

Arvin S. Gibson (1924 - 2004) was the author of many books on the topic in the years 1993, 1994, 1999, 2006, and 2011. He said: "In my opinion they (NDEs) represent one of the

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[99] Nelson, *Beyond the Veil.* v.4. 1, 10-11.
[100] Nelson, *Beyond the Veil.* v.4. 14.
[101] Lee Nelson, *Beyond the Veil, Volumes 1,2,3*. (Cedar Fort, 1989). Lee Nelson, *Visions from Beyond the Veil* (Council Press, an imprint of Cedar Fort, 2014). Lee, Nelson, and Richard Nelson. *NDE: Near Death Experiences* (Cedar Fort. 1994).

clearest fingerprints of God." [102]Arvin Gibson is one of the more prolific Mormon writers of the late 20th century, having penned several books and articles on the topic of VTEs which appeal to both the ordinary reader and the academic. [103] He was both a military veteran and a mechanical engineer and began his second career as a respected researcher in near-death experiences after retirement until his death aged 94 years old.[104] He frequently wrote for the Journal of Near-Death Studies and founded the Utah chapter of IANDS in 1995. His first three books on the topic, Glimpses of Eternity, Echoes from Eternity and Journeys Beyond Life are like Nelson's approach, because they contain many testimonies that speak for themselves.

Glimpses of Eternity (1992) This book contains 145 personal narratives taken from personal interviews with NDErs, mostly Mormons, given that research was conducted in Utah.[105] He was encouraged to write by his friend Duane Crowther, who says in the foreword that his approach to VTEs was more historical than Gibson's modern primary source interviews. Crowther also adds a personal story of driving the body of his deceased four-year-old daughter who had died from cancer, back from the hospital, and how her adult spirit had appeared to his wife in the car.[106] One personal family spiritual experience can inspire one author to write and in turn he inspires another. This attests to the highly personal and significant nature of these life-changing experiences. The second part of the book gives an LDS framework and interpretation of the experiences. He discusses the Light, life's purpose, spirit bodies, the other world, evil

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[102] Arvin S. Gibson, *Fingerprints of God* (Horizon 1999),193.

[103] Arvin S. Gibson, *Echoes from Eternity* (Cedar Fort, 1993). Gibson, Fingerprints of God. Gibson, Glimpses of Eternity. Arvin S. Gibson, *Journeys Beyond Life: True Accounts of Next-World Experiences* (Horizon Publishers, 1994). Arvin S. Gibson, *They Saw Beyond Death: New Insights on Near-Death Experiences* (Cedar Fort, 2006). Arvin S. Gibson, "Near-Death Experience Patterns from Research in the Salt Lake City Region." *Journal of Near-Death Studies*. 13, no. 2 (1994).

[104] Link to the Obituary of Arvin S. Gibson: https://digital.library.unt.edu/ark:/67531/metadc799263/.

[105] Gibson, *Glimpses of Eternity,* 17.

[106] Gibson, *Glimpses of Eternity,* 11.

spirits, The power of God, judgement and revelation, Deity and human destiny. Crowther encouraged him to continue writing the next book a year later, Echoes from Eternity (1993). It contains 136 personal narratives arranged under 18 themes such as the Life review or seeing the Light. Just over half of the interviewees were LDS, with the others Christian or atheist. The second part is more explanatory, trying to make sense of the testimonies and discusses the Plan of Salvation, freedom of choice, negative experiences, the role of family and the appearance of deity. Gibson says that the purpose of this book is to present important material as well as a review of these experiences from a Mormon perspective to help readers share in the spiritual journey of the experiencers.[107] From his own viewpoint as an active latter-day saint, these testimonies bear witness to truth and support his faith. [108] He concedes that the NDE does not prove that there is life after death and indeed infers that ambiguity is necessary to ensure freedom and test faith on the Earth, for it was for this very reason, he says, we all have amnesia of the spirit world upon birth. Where this is not the case the Plan of Salvation could be compromised.[109] He then discusses how the scheme of the premortal life, agency, and other church teachings are in accordance with the narratives. He tackles the topic of negative experiences and Satan.[110] In the last two chapters he discusses patterns in the narrative and the role of families. (e.g., light, color, spirits, communication, life review, buildings, knowledge, music, mission, healing, time and encounters with deity.)

In 1999 he published *Fingerprints of God* which has a foreword by Kenneth Ring. Ring shares my own observation when he notes that there are impressive congruencies between LDS

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[107] Gibson, *Echoes from Eternity*, 14.
[108] Gibson, *Echoes from Eternity*, 16,19.
[109] Gibson, *Echoes from Eternity*, 227.
[110] Gibson, *Echoes from Eternity*, 249-261.

Theology and NDE testimonies and 'many teachings in LDS that are very consonant with the implications of NDEs.'[111] Ring observes that Mormonism is a religion rooted in personal revelation and for that reason Mormons are attracted to reading about NDES. [112] It is a more complex book interweaving Mormon Theology, with VTE narratives. He places his work in context within the development of the field of Near-Death Studies and research current at the time of writing. This demonstrates how the features and elements of the narratives about death and the otherworld can enrich and inform an already robust faith view. He expands his explanations to incorporate an attempt at reconciling VTEs, Faith and quantum physics, discussing ideas such as multiple universes.[113]

The most developed, sophisticated, long and complex book, published after his own death, is *They Saw Beyond Death* (2006). It mentions his contemporaries Crowther, Lundahl, Widdison, Top, Hinze, Nelson and other Mormon research efforts. It discusses the correlation between NDEs and Mormon Theology and LDS teachings. It includes interviews with experiencers, but the main thrust is a discussion of NDE research and its implications. It also discusses the impacts that NDEs and their study have had on the personal spiritual journeys of individuals and of Gibson himself. In his conclusion he states the contribution NDE researchers have made to the field of Near-Death studies.[114] Gibson, like his Mormon contemporaries, helped bring discussions of VTEs and NDEs into a wider arena, and into the discipline of Near-Death Studies. They all documented, curated and gathered many sources, and offered theological explanations.

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[111] Gibson, *Fingerprints of God*, 23.
[112] Gibson, *Fingerprints of God*, 23.
[113] Gibson, *Fingerprints of God*, 256.
[114] Gibson, *Fingerprints of God*, 370.

Sullivan, Marlene Bateman

Marlene Bateman Sullivan wrote four books in the years 2002,2013,2016. Martin Tanner recommended her books to me as one of the best starting points in my study of Mormon VTEs.[115] Bateman focuses on VTEs from early church history and is filled with testimonies that perfectly balance the more modern interview style books previously described. This is a specialist area hardly tackled by other writers and Bateman finds many obscure and hitherto unpublished stories which she cleverly and neatly presents within twenty-five chapters, each focusing on a different element or aspect of a VTE. She presents near-death experiences as if they were a journey, from the initial out of body, to meeting a guide, to what is seen and experienced and the narratives of the return. She discusses the spirit body, family relationships, the physical side of the spirit world, and what is taught and learned there. In describing the importance of completing ordinances on both sides of the Veil she cleverly weaves in Mormon Theology. In the ending chapters she compared modern and older 19th century experiences and ponders what can be learned from them. She provides an important appendix with common elements in LDS near-death experiences and a list of corresponding accounts. She notices, as I also did, that what is remarkable about the 19th century accounts, is that the elements of the experiences are described consistently, even a century before Moody recorded and defined them. I have often heard sceptics dismiss the topic of NDEs with the accusation that people had heard about what happens on TV or read it in Moody's book and then experienced it from some buried suggestion in their memory. Some people even say there were no NDE's before Moody. What is

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[115] Marlene Bateman Sullivan, *Gaze into Heaven: Near-death Experiences in Early Church History* (Cedar Fort. 2013). Marlene Bateman Sullivan, *The Magnificent World of Spirits: Eyewitness Accounts of Where We Go When We Die* (Cedar Fort. 2016). Marlene Bateman Sullivan, *Visits from Beyond the Veil: True Stories of Angelic Visitations* (Horizon, 2002). Marlene Bateman Sullivan, *And There Were Angels among Them: Spiritual Visitations in Early Church History* (Horizon, 2002).

clear from Bateman's book is that unusual spiritual visions around the time of death have been experienced and recorded in the Mormon community for the past two hundred years. The label is of no consequence, what counts is that the contents and elements of these religious experiences have changed little in their main structure and despite individual differences, broad similarities exist in the narratives. [116] Her explanation for the similarities across time is simple: "The spirit world is stable and constant." [117]

The Magnificent World of Spirits (2015) is similar in structure and approach the previous book but instead of focusing on historical narratives, it maps out a picture of the spirit world and describes how it operates, bringing in Mormon Theology and some narratives at the same time. Topics include the beauty of the spirit world, its social structures, and its different spheres, and how people are busy and active there, still receiving the Gospel. It is aimed at a more religious audience, especially those in the Mormon faith, and written from a faith perspective of trust in an eternal life. Crowther wrote the foreword, showing the tight knit relationships between all Mormon writers in this genre. Elder Boyd K. Packer of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles said, "Revelation continues with us today. The promptings of the Spirit, the dreams, and the visions and the visitations, and the ministering of angels all are with us now." [118]

In 2002 Bateman wrote two books on the topic of angelic visitation, which is a VTE topic, because this time angels from one side of the Veil are visiting people here and intervening in Earthly lives. These books fit into a Mormon worldview and theology but are less widely

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[116] Sullivan, *Gaze into Heaven,* 3.
[117] Sullivan, *Gaze into Heaven*, 21.
[118] General Conference 1989. ; Elder Boyd K. Packer, "Revelation in a Changing World," 1989, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1989/10/revelation-in-a-changing-world?lang=eng.

known or discussed. As well as presenting a description of angels she reports narratives on their visitations to help people, and their appearances in the Temple. Both books list stories of angelic visits throughout two hundred years of Mormon history to the present. Bateman contributed to the historical and doctrinal understanding of VTEs. She stayed within theological boundaries and her perspective is informed by her strong faith.

Sarah Hinze

Sarah Hinze is the author of several books and writer of a DVD documentary called Remembering Heaven.[119] I met Sarah Hinze in Salt Lake City in 2022. I shared with her my own personal lucid dream experience of pre-birth announcement for my last child Ebrahim. An angel handed me my infant son and announced his name to me, at the time of his conception. Hinze is the authority on VTE experiences on the pre-birth side of VTEs, and she explains the mechanism of how children incarnate. Her books are full of the testimonies of parents who have many experiences of meeting their children to be, or who have their births announced by angels. Hinze describes herself as leading research of prebirth experiences. Author of several books and a recently released documentary movie called Remembering Heaven. Mainstream Christians assume that heaven is a place where the faithful go after death. Her work argues that we come from heaven and then return there, which explains the feeling that many NDERs have of 'going home' and recognizing the afterlife realms. She wrote *Life Before Life* to contrast with Raymond

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[119] Sarah Hinze, *We Lived on Heaven: Spiritual Accounts of Souls Coming to Earth* (Spring Creek Book Company, 2006). Sarah Hinze, *The Announcing Dream: Dreams and Visions of Children Waiting to Be Born* (Three Orchard Productions 2016). Sarah Hinze, and Tom Laughlin, *Remembering Heaven.* DVD (Three Orchard Productions. 2022). Sarah Hinze, *Coming from the Light* (Cedar Fort, 1994). It is identical to her later book of a different title *We Lived in Heaven*. Sarah Hinze, *We Lived in Heaven: Spiritual Accounts of Souls Coming to Earth* (Spring Creek Book, 2006). Sarah Hinze, *Memories of Heaven : Together with the Hymn of the Pearl by Thomas the Apostle* (Three Orchard Productions, 2017). Sarah Hinze, *Remembering Heaven*. DVD. https://www.imdb.com/title/tt19766370/. Sarah Hinze, *The Announcing Dream: Dreams and Visions About Children Waiting to Be Born* (Three Orchard Productions, 2016).

Moody's Life After Life, and to counter the typical assumption that life begins at conception and the polarity trope in popular culture of birth vs death.[120] In reality, she argues, they are just the entrance and exit for our temporary life performance on the stage or school of Earth, just part of our whole existence in eternity before and after Earthly life. Her work focuses on prebirth memories, visions of one's premortal life and premonitory dream announcing a pregnancy and birth of a child.[121] The testimonies are from the mothers who communicated with these angels who were soon to be born as their children. This is a common genre of writing in Mormon literature, and it reflects the theological belief in the premortal existence, and the idea that Earth lives and parents are planned and chosen before a spirit becomes embodied.[122]

In the foreword to *We lived in heaven: Spiritual accounts of souls coming to Earth*,[123] Paul Perry, a scholar in the field, gives a historical background to the idea of premortality. He says "The belief in premortal existence is nothing new, it is very ancient. The ancient Greeks, for instance, spoke of the immortality of the spirit and of a premortal state for man. Plato, responding to Socrates in the *Phaedo,* said: "Your favorite doctrine, Socrates, that knowledge is simply recollection, if true, also necessarily implies a previous time in which we have learned that which we now recollect. But this would be impossible unless our soul has been in some place before existing in the form of man; here then is another proof of the soul's immortality." Mormon doctrine states that human souls were not created.[124] There is considerable evidence to

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[120] Sarah Hinze, *Life Before Life* (Cedar Fort. 1993).

[121] See Jeffrey Mishlove, "Beyond the Brain: The Survival of Human Consciousness after Permanent Bodily Death." *Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies (2021). First prize winning essay in the* (2021). 36.

[122] Disclaimer [I myself have had a private pre-birth memory which was confirmed later by the words given in my Patriarchal Blessing, I also had an angelic dream announcing the birth, which occurred eight months later, of my youngest son Ebrahim in which the angel handed me the infant and announced his name, and I have had two VTE like 'dream' experiences, once and home and once in a hospital though not life threatening situations.

[123] Sarah Hinze, We Lived in Heaven: Spiritual Accounts of Souls Coming To Earth (Spring Creek Book Company, 2006).

[124] Givens, *Wrestling the Angel,* 45.

suggest that belief in premortal existence was openly discussed in the early Christian Church. St. Augustine taught of man's premortal state, writing, "When we reason it is the mind that reasons. For what is thought is eternal, and nothing pertaining to the body is thus eternal. Therefore, the human mind always lives."

Perhaps no Christian scholar spoke more extensively of premortal existence than Origen of Alexandria. He stirred up controversy in the third century church with his belief that some sort of judgment had already taken place before we came to Earth. This judgment was based on work done in a premortal state. In A.D. 543, the Roman xvii emperor Justinian convinced the pope to convene a council to reject the teachings of Origen. Since then, the concept of premortal existence has faded.[125]

Hinze describes her own “hallowed experiences” which confirmed her approach. She says

> “I have a strong and personal interest in the idea that "we lived in heaven" before birth. Before each of our nine children was born, I sensed that he or she was preparing to come to Earth. I prayed for the safe arrival of each of these special spirits. On several occasions I had come to know that these souls wanted to join our family. I received the gift of increasing visits from my unborn children. I could feel that each child had a unique personality and that it was their time to come to Earth with a personal mission only they could fill.”[126]

She met her preborn children in dream – visions. She explained that the same girl that she had lost in a miscarriage returned in her next pregnancy soon after. This was confirmed by what she describes as miraculous spiritual experiences,

> “I sensed a divine, loving, male presence standing in the doorway to my bedroom. In a distinct voice, he decreed of the female infant I had just seen in my dream, "Her name is Sarah. Her name is Sarah." [127]

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[125] Hinze, *We Lived in Heaven,* xvi-xvii.
[126] Hinze, *We Lived in Heaven,* 1.
[127] Hinze, *We Lived in Heaven,* 2.

This reminds me of my own experience of my son arriving with his name already chosen from the other side. Hinze argues that these experiences are quite common. [128] and she offers a scheme of their elements and features which includes visions, dreams, hearing, telepathy, escorts, adoption and déjà vu, radiation of love, celestial light, sense of home, timing of arrival on Earth, warnings, and messages.[129]

She had a mystical experience of her own where she entered the spirit world and met the Lord. She recounts,

> "Eyes closed; a vision unfolded in my mind. I saw my spirit-self departing our heavenly home. The celestial firmament was enveloped in brilliant light, an eternal burning of holy flames that did not consume. It was the place where God dwells. As I continued traveling down through the stars, the pace accelerated. Comfort appeared in a presence, a strengthening escort who emerged by my side. Reawakening to my immediate surroundings, I found myself in prostrate humility, flat on the floor. I sensed a Being of power enter the room. I felt compelled to rise. I felt totally immersed in the love of this great Being. I begged Him to heal my body for the sake of the child within me. In answer, He conveyed these words to my mind: "I am the Great Physician. I will heal your body, and this baby will be born whole and well, for I have so decreed it." [130]

The theological assumptions and beliefs behind these experiences is that contracts about Earth lives and parentage are agreed upon in the spirit world before incarnation. On another occasion she saw her preborn son Matthew standing at the foot of her bed dressed in white. She says.

> "I saw his dusty blond hair and handsome rugged features. He thanked me for the sacrifices of pregnancy I was undergoing, nurturing his body within me so he could come to Earth and begin his mortal mission. He informed me he would be born within a few days. Then he was gone. This precious son was born a week later, bringing a spirit of heavenly unconditional love to our family."[131]

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[128] Hinze, *We Lived in Heaven,* 125.
[129] Hinze, *We Lived in Heaven,* 127-8.
[130] Hinze, *We Lived in Heaven,* 3.
[131] Hinze, *We Lived in Heaven,* 7.

Hinze's books are filled with stories like this, and event that happened to other women. She refers to the two gospel stories of birth announcements given to Elizabeth and Mary by angels. She also mentions another woman, Ranelle Wallace, who had an NDE, and who let her son Nathaniel in the Spirit World. She knew she had to return to her body so that she could subsequently give birth to him and allow him to fulfil his own mission on Earth.[132]

Thus, Hinze's work is tied to the LDS Theology of personal Earthly mission and preaching of the gospel. Hinze calls the prebirth experience a PBE. "The PBE provides evidence that we "come from" the same place we "return to."

> It has been called our heavenly home, our eternal home, the source of our origin. In other words, we come from the Light and return to the Light. You come from a premortal life with a special mission to perform. You are here now by special appointment. This is your time in the whole history of the Earth, the time that you were appointed to receive a mortal body and fulfil your purpose. You are here on an errand from God. You can do much good. Serving your fellow man is a key to filling your mission ... in your home, your job, your neighborhood, or your world."[133]
> Before each of our nine children was born, I sensed that he or she was preparing to come to Earth. I prayed for the safe arrival of each of these special spirits. I received the gift of increasing visits from my preborn through the Veil… it was their time to come to Earth with a personal mission only they could fill.[134] We were honored by a prebirth visitation from Becky's future brother, who was announcing it was his time to come to Earth. The sacred experience faded as my future son concluded his mission and departed. I have come to understand that the unborn often visit their future families and homes.[135]

Very few writers in the field of Near-Death Studies tackle PBEs or the phenomenon of birth announcements. Academia has largely ignored PBEs and birth announcements, even though many mothers report mystical experiences surrounding pregnancy and childbirth. All the emphasis is given around death rather than at birth. Hinze is a deeply religious woman, and her work reflects her own theological framing and explanation for all these experiences. Hinze does

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[132] Hinze, *We Lived in Heaven,* 110-111.
[133] Hinze, *We Lived in Heaven,* 120, 3.
[134] Hinze, *We Lived in Heaven,* 10.
[135] Hinze, *We Lived in Heaven,* 10.

not step out of her tradition to give a non-religious explanation. I do not think this is a weakness although some might say a non-religious explanation is superior to a religious one. I do not agree. We all bring our own perspectives and biases to the table. Our explanations must be authentic to our identities. Answers come from the union of many voices and positions. The scientific method lauds 'neutral objectivity' but I question if anyone can be free of all bias, for even agnosticism it its own perspective and science has been called scientism.

Brent Top

Brent Top is a BYU professor who has written several books and some articles on the topic of VTE's and NDEs. [136] He also wrote articles in the later 90s in the Journal of Near-Death Studies and other publications making him one of the more prolific early LDS writers on the topic. He also gave speeches and published articles on the topic in Church magazines. e.g., Devotional Speech at BYU 2010 about death.[137] We exchanged emails whilst I wrote this dissertation, and he gave me his encouragement. His books tend to repeat core theological ideas, and most cover the same materials, largely because they are aimed at a specific audience, e.g. The Immortal Spirit and The Spirit World. Discussion and description are solidly based on scripture and the teachings of Church leaders. He is writing from the 'insider' faith perspective of an active LDS Church member and BYU teacher, a standing with gives him authority in

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[136] Brent L. Top, and Wendy C Top. *Beyond Death's Door: Understanding Near-Death Experiences in Light of the Restored Gospel* (Bookcraft, 1993). -- Brent L. Top, *The Life Before* (Bookcraft, 1988). Brent L, Top, and Wendy C Top. *Glimpses Beyond Death's Door: Gospel Insights into Near-Death Experiences* (Granite Pub. and Distribution, 2005). Brent L. Top, *What's on the Other Side? What the Gospel Teaches Us About the Spirit World* (Deseret Book, 2012)

[137] Brent L. Top, "The Near-Death Experience: Why Latter-day Saints Are So Interested" in *Life Beyond the Grave: Christian Interfaith Perspectives,* ed. Alonzo L. Gaskill and Robert L. Millet (Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University; Deseret Book, 2019), 91–112. Brent Top, "The Near-Death Experience", BYU Religious Studies Center, 2022, https://rs c.byu.edu/life-beyond-grave/near-death-experience. "What's on the Other Side? A Conversation with Brent L. Top on the Spirit World." *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 14, no. 2 (2013): 42-63. https://scholarsarchive.byu.edu/re/vol14/ iss2/5.

addition the authority of his priesthood voice. While personal experiences from both LDS and non-LDS are referred to, they are not a basis for his main presentation, and not accepted as a source of doctrine. His authoritative contribution to the topic in his works provided a useful baseline for my understanding of VTEs from a legitimate voice as an insider to the Church. I respect Top's work as a theologian and his calls for maintaining the sacred and personal nature of NDEs.

Again, as with other Mormon scholars, coming from a theological perspective, there is little dialogue outside of the religious sphere with other types of academics on this topic. There seems to be a barrier between interfaith discussion and debates with scientists on NDEs. Since the passing of Lundahl a more isolationist trend has resumed. This is understandable given that mainstream Christians challenge some of the main Mormon doctrines such as the preexistence, and the general hostility to what are seen as 'supernatural' worldviews in the wider culture.

Gregory Shushan

Shushan is a secular non-Mormon academic outsider who respects all traditions. His main thesis in all his books, that afterlife beliefs evolve from personal religious experiences and then become doctrine. So, while Top does not accept the individual's experience as a source of doctrine, Shushan argues that individual experiences have contributed to doctrinal development. This demonstrates the different approaches and perspectives between a faith believer and those from a different mindset. I am not concerned with who is right or wrong here, but merely want to point out how the perspective of each academic guides their approach, and that in theological matters there is no final judgement, it is a matter of faith. This shows that VTE narratives are treated differently, and used for different purposes and arguments, by different camps of scholars. In the middle of this dissertation, we will see that these different perspectives color the

different explanations offered to explain religious experiences. What I noticed is that VTEs tend to confirm and reinforce doctrine, and the experiences of early Church leaders did help form doctrine. The very method of putting the Book of Mormon to paper involved a spiritual aspect, almost 'channeling' the Divine revelation. If some Mormons had VTEs that contradicted their faith I did not come across any accounts. Some Mormons may have chosen not to share them, if indeed any contradictory visions were experienced, but this is worth noting. Now some have come close to this, and received criticism, when mentioning apocalyptic scenarios, but from their perspective it conformed to their beliefs.

In an LDS context, I would argue that the experiences of Joseph Smith and Church leaders formed the basis of their teachings on otherworldly topics. The crux of the matter is that Top is an active Church leader himself and an influential BYU professor and it is expected for him to uphold the authority of the Church in this situation. This is his solid perspective, and it avoids the religious problems that can arise when personal faith is built on variable and conflicting religious experiences. Indeed, as I discuss later in the section on the dangers of personal revelation, the visions of those in authority are treated differently from those of ordinary folk, and for good reason, because unless there is a structure to process religious experiences, chaos schism and challenges to authority can ensue.

Brent Top's books are informative and 'doctrinally correct' and provide an honest view of how the mainstream LDS Church categorizes the VTE phenomenon. Since the publication of Top's books, he has not contributed further works on this topic, and it is no longer an area of interest for him to write about. We did correspond, and he graciously directed me to three LDS authors that I already knew in this area, and he said there may be gaps in LDS VTE research. I think that the gaps are not in collecting more data, or compiling an encyclopedia list of them, but

rather in their analysis. The contents of most LDS VTEs follow strong narrative patterns and contain stereotypical elements and what is lacking are exciting perspectives to explore their implications. I think it is important to step out of the box, out of an active LDS arena, and look at the well-known testimonies with fresh eyes in the light of recent developments in the area of Near-Death Studies. Unlike Top, my career does not depend on upholding orthodoxy, which gives me the freedom to ask more probing questions about this data and its origins and implications. In his book *What's on the Other Side?* (2012) he examines the immortal spirit, the spirit world, ministers of the Gospel, going home to the spirit world, the life review and the law of restoration, and what matters most. In the preface Top says that he has thirty years of reading behind him and his interest in NDEs is only as far as they relate to an LDS doctrinal framework. This is an understandable, solid and respectable faith-based approach,

Faith based analysis can be challenged when one encounters elements in the narrative which do not align with doctrine. Similarly, when a scientific reductionist encounters the so - called 'supernatural' this is also a challenge. An example of this is Top's rejection of the 'being of light' as being a divine being and assigning it only a representative role. [138]This is his position despite the deeply felt certainty of experiencers who are convinced they met a divine figure. He calls VTE's merely "interesting", whereas he exalts the doctrine behind them as "imperative" and it is their doctrinal aspects only that interest him.[139] The main reason he hints, is that his approach avoids deception and remains consistent with 'truths'. [140]

Top gives prominence and respect to Swedenborg in all his books and quotes from his works heavily. As a good Christian, Swedenborg is honored with a vision of the afterlife but as

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[138] Top, Brent. *Glimpses Beyond Death's Door (*Covenant Communications, 2012), 281.
[139] Top, *Glimpses Beyond,* x.
[140] Top, *Glimpses Beyond,* x.

Top says "He and others like him who have been blessed with spiritual experiences and visions of eternity are somewhat limited in their understanding and explanation because they do not possess an understanding and testimony of the gospel of Jesus Christ restored through the Prophet Joseph Smith in this dispensation.[141] In other words, while all humans are children of God, only baptized and confirmed members of the LDS church have access to the blessings of the restored Gospel and its truths and the inspiration of the Holy Ghost which can act as a guide. Swedenborg, whilst a good man, was, from the LDS viewpoint, deprived of this and the insight that an LDS person would have, and so was at a disadvantage and unable to describe and explain the full implications of his visions.

Whilst most academics are usually not 'guided by the spirit' as they write, in this field of Theology, there is an aspect where one's own faith and internal spirituality is touched upon so that true objectivity might be impossible even in my own case. It is this scholarly honesty about self-positioning and self-identification that is encouraged in my discipline by Thomas A Tweed, *Crossing and Dwelling* 2006. He says the most expressed sentiment of those who have glimpsed beyond the Veil is that each of us have a purpose for our life. We are here to fulfill foreordained purposes and have opportunities to grow personally and to serve and strengthen others. To do this we must live worthily. After this life we will be assessed in how much we achieved this. [142]

Modern Current Voices in LDS Circles

VTE's deal with birth just as much as death. That is why the label NDE does not apply to the variety of Mormon spiritual experiences. VTE's contain not just deathbed experiences but all

[141] Top, *Glimpses Beyond*, xxi.
[142] Brent Top, *What's on the Other Side* (Deseret Book Co., 2012), 75.

experiences with the Veil and birth is one of these sacred times when the Veil is crossed. Many of the modern voices are to be heard in less than formal settings and increasingly on social media. Daniel C. Peterson talks at lectures and Martin Tanner has his own radio podcast.[143] Jeff O'Driscoll and Jeffery C. Olsen co-authored a book[144] and both give social media lectures together. At the IANDS conference in Salt Lake City in 2022 all four intermingled at the Conference and their close social ties were obvious. There are various social media platforms featuring others such as Kevin Christensen who is a freelance writer with an interest in Mormon Theology who compares events in the life of Alma and Lehi's dream with NDE writings.

In O'Driscoll and Olsen's book Olson states in the foreword:

> My near-death experience sustained me through the grief, shock and bereavement of losing so much." He talks about 'traveling beyond the mortal Veil" 145 He adds that "My near-death experience is not nearly as important as my Life Experience and what I came here to learn in every sacred moment of the eternal continuum of now. [146]

O'Driscoll met Olsen on the night of his SLC accident. O'Driscoll hasn't had an NDE, but he has had many spiritual experiences, he calls them near-death experiences which I think they count as VTEs. He reports that also met the spirit of Tamara, Jeff's wife, in the trauma room. She had died at the scene and left her body in southern Utah. She had come to watch over her husband. He thinks she came to introduce us because knew they would become friends. He reports being perfectly comfortable with NDEs and shared-death experiences (SDEs). After 25 years, and encounters both in and out of the ER, he says he has witnessed and experienced quite enough spiritual phenomena to know first-hand. He describes the Veil as the boundary between mortality and eternity.

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[143] *Religion Today* hosted by Martin Tanner, KSL Podcasts, https://kslpodcasts.com/podcast/religion-today/.
[144] O'Driscoll, *Not Yet.*
[145] O'Driscoll, *Not Yet,* i.
[146] O'Driscoll, *Not Yet,* ii.

O'Driscoll speaks freely about his ability to see the spirits of the dead, an ability he discovered when he saw the spirit of his brother Stan who had died in an accident aged 15 in 1973. [147]As a physician in the ER, he often witnessed the spirits of patients, which incidentally corresponded with a common element in VTE's, the spirits often looked young and not old like the bodies in the beds.[148] It takes courage for a physician to share information about seeing spirits. His faith gives him confidence to express himself. Mainstream medicine, however, would likely dismiss his claims. Traditional science and medicine have simply dismissed such spiritual views because it deems them impossible. Olsen would be accused of hallucinating and O'Driscoll would be accused of delusion or deception. I have met both men and they are sincere when they express these views, and they are solid in their faith. There are so many psi coincidences in such experiences and dismissing them without cause is weak.

Sheldon Lawrence is a BYU Idaho English professor who wrote a fictional work based on his NDE research, and the story is a mélange of the main VTE elements.[149] Writing fiction is a good way to deflect criticism and controversy whilst getting a message across to an audience.[150] In this work he has created a quintessential template of a VTE. Lawrence writes "God's work is not to sort out the righteous from the wicked, but to awaken souls to an understanding of their true selves."[151] Another approach covering this genre is Wesley M. White's 2020 book *Where do we go from here? The answers to your questions about our next*

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[147] O'Driscoll, *Not Yet*, 11.

[148] O'Driscoll, *Not Yet*, 46.

[149] Sheldon Lawrence, *Hearts of the Fathers: A Story of Heaven, Hell, and the Hope Of New Life After Life* (Stillwaters Press, 2016). Reprinted under the new title: Sheldon Lawrence, *Heaven Will Find You: A Story of Hope, Healing, and the Afterlife* (Stillwaters Press, 2023).

[150] He is interviewed here. Meditations on the Mount, "Does the Afterlife Matter? How NDEs Provide Real Answers," December 23, 2023, https://youtu.be/J8SZqHsjTEE?si=Ll_FwLGOOsOfDefm.

[151] Lawrence, *Hearts of the Fathers*, 143.

life. [152] He discusses Mormon themes in VTEs such as premortality, the Spirit World in all its many aspects from colors to learning and social life, foreordination, Temples in the Spirit World, angels, missionary work on the other side and the spirits of children. It is written in a casual but reverent tone, aimed at the ordinary reader. These books written by Mormon writers do not shy away from linking the data with their faith and interpreting the data through their own 'eyeglasses.' This is not a reason to dismiss their great work and efforts. One simply has to read the narratives and the data as a reader, and the stories speak for themselves. A phenomenological treatment of the data focuses on the data itself…nevertheless the sum of all the data paints a picture of the otherworld not dissimilar to the conclusions of the Mormon writers. As a comparative theologian, I am well versed in the different afterlife scenarios presented by these various religions. In my humble opinion the LDS version and picture corresponds more closely with the generic NDE in the modern period more than any other religious template. The impact of thousands of VTE and NDE reports is cumulative and requires explanation, not just description.

The Impact of Mormon scholarship on NDEs and VTEs

I have presented and discussed the life work of these eminent Mormon scholars. Their work shows that Mormon NDEs do indeed mirror Mormon society on Earth and are compatible with Mormon doctrines and beliefs about the Spirit World. Now some might argue that it is expected that people of a certain religion envision an afterlife according to their prior beliefs. I

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[152] Wesley M. White, and Rachel P. Andersen. *Where Do We Go from Here? The Answers to Your Questions About Our next Life* (CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc., 2020). This is "a question/answer research booklet that answers the most-asked questions about the spirit world by looking at the resources provided by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. White also uses a near death experience of a neighbor to answer some of the questions as to what will happen when we pass beyond the Veil." --From the Back Cover.

cannot prove that the Spirit World exists in actuality, and to accept this view of the afterlife is a faith position. I would argue that afterlife visions are wishful thinking, but an afterlife might possibly exist regardless of the wishes of humans. I would tend to accept VTEs at face value because of the number and consistency of the reports. The scholars I have discussed collected a marvelous variety of experiences and testimonies and were able to sort them into categories but most of them concentrated on the Mormon community. They did not engage in Comparative Theology with other traditions. They were aware of, and some wrote about non-Mormon NDEs, usually other Western and Christian accounts. and drew parallels. Finding similar accounts from non-Mormon sources, which involve similar elements and themes adds to the cumulative evidence that the Mormon experiences are part of a larger human experience.

Chapter Two

Mormon VTEs: Data and Analysis

I have used the term VTE to cover types of religious experiences that are wider than mere deathbed NDE types. The term 'Veil' refers to the Veil separating the Earth world from the spirit world, and through which traffic can pass in both directions. A human usually traverses the Veil at birth, when memory of previous existence is 'wiped', and again at death. However, during certain altered state of consciousness, not just during a medical crisis or trauma event, but perhaps an emotional state of prayer, or in a dream, or because of divine revelation in the case of Joseph Smith Jr., the Veil can be rendered 'thin' and can be crossed. These experiences are often unsolicited and unexpected. VTE's include religious visions, dreams, visitations from spiritual beings, as well as generic NDEs. It also includes experiences of premortality, pre-birth memories, or 'meeting' children yet to be born.

The data: Two hundred years of data, over a hundred narratives, listed in chronological order and sorted by elements of the religious experience, is contained in the large appendices at the end of this dissertation. The data was sourced from various locations: libraries in Utah and California,[1] from published books and articles, and from videos, podcasts, and videos on social media. Some sources were well known reports from Church leaders, or from family journals held in the Church History Library in Salt Lake City, Utah. I also consulted the Special Collections Library at BYU in Provo, Utah. Digital, including recorded audio interviews and written sources. I also gathered resources from the IANDS conference in Salt Lake City in the Summer of 2022.

[1] Specifically, the digital resources of the Huntington Library in San Marino, California.

I did not want to limit my search for sources of NDE reports to books. VTE's are part of an oral tradition, first existing as primacy sources and social media is the perfect medium to capture these testimonies. It also means that LDS testimonies are becoming available to a worldwide audience.[2] Nowadays there are multiple forms of platforms which can facilitate self-expression.[3]

In the 19th century local and faith-based journals and magazines were popular places to express personal experiences. In the late 20th century paperback publications of NDE experiences grew into a genre of its own. However, the internet has offered a digital space for many ordinary people to voice their experiences, people that would not ordinarily publish their own stories. Fear of ridicule has often been a barrier for many NDErs to share their experiences and some express private experiences in closed Facebook groups, on YouTube and in blogs and Podcasts. Here can be found many conversations with other NDErs, who often compare experiences and ruminate on their meaning and significance. Academia has traditionally not engaged the phenomena of social media as a source. It would be unfortunate to ignore the internet which is a rich place to find primary sources for NDEs. That is why I want to include testimonies from various sources

[2] LDS experiencers often do not identify themselves as LDS. This avoids prejudice and judgment from outsiders and avoids controversy within the community.

[3] Facebook has closed groups named LDS Near Death Experience Discussion and LDS Association of Near Death Experience Studies and Uncensored LDS Church Experiences and Doctrines. There is a new podcast called *Round Trip Death* by Mormon Eric Bennett broadcast from SLC UT (see, Spotify. Round Trip Death Podcast. "Near-Death Experiences" #301, Vinney Tolman, January 2023, https://open.spotify.com/show/6qnTtVz0kj4EzXZK1Sa3Uj). Martin Tanner has a popular podcast called 'Religion Today' on the KSL network https://kslpodcasts.com/podcast/religion-today /. The YouTube channel "Latter-Day Lights" often features NDEs (https://www.youtube.com/@latterdaylights). They also have a website: https://www.latterdaylights.com /. *JeffMara Podcast*, one of the best channels in the genre, has also featured some LDS testimonies, e.g., Vinney Todd Tolman in 2023. JeffMara Podcast, "He Died For 45 Minutes & Went To Heaven - Near Death Experience", October 24, 2022, https://youtu.be/z6VKuhpE7Cc?si=M9g4X6BfUf4g5ma4.

both written and online. Amy Call is a Mormon woman who had a very detailed NDE.[4] However in this account she downplays and does not emphasize her LDS connection.[5]

I feel I have justification in using nontraditional sources such as social media for cutting edge fieldwork in my academic research. Listening to experiencers speak is a close one can get to having an experience oneself. The collection of a living oral tradition would be incomplete without utilizing social media, which offers access to direct testimony of experiencers as a direct primary source. This is especially important in accessing the voices of ordinary people, who fifty years ago would not have had an outlet to a wider audience. In the past only the rich and influential, for the most part, could enter the public domain and publishers controlled the gates of information. In 2023 most of the current cultural debates and testimonies of spirituality and religious experiences from the grassroots levels come through social media and self-publishing modalities. It gives an impression of more content being available, or more religious experiences being had, but I suspect that in the past experiences were just underreported or suppressed because of cultural taboos and the fear experiencers had of being labeled as insane. Self-expression and self-reporting of religious experiences indeed carries less shame and risk than in previous generations.

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[4] David Sunfellow, "Amy Call," *The Formula for Creating Heaven on Earth* (blog), March 26, 2022, https://ndestories.org/amy-call/; KMVT, "Present!—Amy Call's Near-Death Experience," KMVT15 Community Media, posted September 24, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qX803D_cofI.

[5] One reason might be that she wants to reach a wider "Christian" and secular audience. Yet common LDS theology can be seen in her testimony such as the impression of the spirit, family ties between the living and the dead, and the role of other planets in the plan of the universe.

Mormon VTEs and an In-Depth Analysis of Themes, Patterns, Trends, and Conclusions[6]

This data is taken mostly from Mormons in the Western United States and predominantly reflects the testimonies of LDS Saints in Utah, Arizona, Nevada, Idaho, and California. The appendices at the end of this dissertation contain the full list of VTE's used for this chapter. In my analysis I found few differences between gender, age, and social status in the VTEs. Some differences were observed in the older (19th to early 20th century) compared to the modern (post 1960) VTE's but similarities outweighed these. For example, the theme of recorded knowledge was always present but after the first libraries were established in Utah at the turn of the 1900s more libraries were being mentioned in the visions, and 21st century reports involve television screens and portable devices.[7] I found many definite trends and themes which echoed those found in generic non LDS experiences, which I expected, as well as Mormon specific details which were also expected e.g. meeting LDS Prophets, or seeing the preexistence.

The Sources Many of the older sources are secondary, but as the ability to voice one's experiences in print and then in social media grew the majority of modern VTEs are primary sourced testimonies. As for their disclosure of situatedness, it should also me mentioned that not all Mormons self-disclose their affiliation to the Church, for various reasons. Perhaps they want to reach a wider audience, without being dismissed by other Christian denominations. (such as Betty Eadie). Church leaders have encouraged the keeping of VTEs in confidence as sacred

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[6] I will define this term in greater depth in the dissertation. "Mormon" is a catch all label for various religious groups linked to Joseph Smith Jr. (1805-1844) and it is not limited to the more influence Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, who incidentally prefer not to be referred to by the term Mormon. The term Mormon Studies is still accepted in Academia, and I use the term Mormon NDEs loosely to refer to NDEs experienced by those identifying as Mormon.

[7] When libraries appeared in the United States reference to libraries began to appear in NDEs. i.e. they reflect technological developments.

experiences, not to be shared in most circumstances, just like how the contents of Patriarchal Blessings are sacred. This leads into the idea of secrecy and reluctance to share one's sacred experiences. Just as Temple rituals are sacred and secret to outsiders, revealing one's intimate religious experience can put one in a vulnerable position. Whilst inter-family sharing might be accepted, global broadcasting of these experiences is not always favored or encouraged. Avoiding conflict with authority is another concern. Mormon culture is already very accepting of the concept of the intervention of the Holy Ghost in everyday life situations, called 'prompting of the spirit' so I would argue that Mormons are already receptive to messages from across the Veil. These messages are personal however, and if shared at all would likely be when testimonies are shared in a sacrament meeting or similar gathering of insiders.

The Context The context of these VTEs is important, and the physical context, not just the spiritual. The early Mormon church faced attacks from other Christians, and this pushed them out West which posed different kinds of threats and dangers. Pioneers faced death and danger every day and so lived close to the Veil. It must be acknowledged that life in the 19th century was harsh and even harsher for the pioneer Mormons marching Westward to Utah. Many died on this journey in the mid-19th century. There was harsh weather, hunger, disease, difficult childbirths, attack from First Nations peoples, and accidents. Death was present for these early Mormons, not all children survived, and their religious beliefs helped give them hope and a reason to continue the struggle. It can be argued that many of the sermons and writings in the 19th century were shaped by these circumstances. Being in a supportive community with a strong religious faith, was a way to cope and despite all these hardships, the Mormons flourished. I found little difference between the early and more modern VTEs. The earlier tended to be secondary rather than primary accounts, especially for women, whereas the more modern accounts tend to be from

the mouth of the experiencer. There is the initial experience, then the interpretated experience. This might be followed by a recalled experience narrated later in which changes from the original narrative may or may not occur. Some VTEs may not be primary sources but secondary, such as a narrative about another family member's NDE. [8] Older VTE's tend to list more secondary sources, but social media allows for more primary accounts.

The Early Mormon Background

I make a slight distinction between the VTEs of early church leaders and those of ordinary Mormons. The way that Church leadership, religious experience and doctrine are interwoven has always been complex. Early experiences helped shape the Mormon view of death. There is a definite patriarchal structure of societies on Earth and in the afterlife. Home and family are glorified and extolled. Large families are encouraged in this community. Duty and obedience, good moral behavior and self-discipline is expected. There is no belief in death as the end.

> We live, then; we do not die; we do not anticipate death; but we anticipate life, immortality, glory, exaltation, and to be quickened by the glory of the celestial kingdom and receive of the same even a fulness. This is our destiny; this is the exalted position to which we may attain. [9]

Neil L. Andersen teaches that our birth and our death are just steps in our progression. This means that out identity remains stable. He adds that "We remain the same person we were prior to our death but without our body. I believe that eventually our spirit will reunite with our body. This is the Resurrection. Our personal identity will remain with us forever. The faith,

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[8] These can be written in abbreviated form as 'NDE - e or NDE as experienced/ 'NDE- n' or NDE as narrated/ 'NDE – r' or NDEs retold by others.

[9] Joseph Fielding Smith, and John Andreas Widtsoe. *Gospel Doctrine Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith* (Deseret News, 1919), 558.

understanding, character, and qualities we develop on Earth go with us. For all of us, death is an important transition to the next stage in God's plan of happiness for His children. We continue to learn and progress. We continue to interact with others."[10] The theme of progression is seen in VTE reports that allude to the need to return to Earth to carry out missions and tasks in the body.

Joseph Smith & Brigham Young and Their VTEs As a Model for Others

> All men know that they must die; and it is important that we should understand the reasons and causes of our exposure to the vicissitudes of life, and of death; and the designs and purposes of God in our coming into the world, our sufferings here, and our departure hence. What is the object of our coming into existence, then dying and falling away to be here no more? It is but reasonable to suppose that God would reveal something in reference to the matter, and it is a subject we ought to study more than any other; — we ought to study it day and night; for the world is ignorant in reference to their true condition and relation. If we have any claim on our Heavenly Father for anything, it is for knowledge on this important subject. [11] (Joseph Smith Jr.)

The foundation of all Mormonism rests upon Joseph Smith Jr., his Visions, and the Book of Mormon published in 1830, in Palmyra N.Y. It was also shaped and developed in continuous revelation until the present day by LDS Church leaders, and by other leaders in the many sects that branched off.[12] An encounter with divine messengers has sparked other world religions. As Terryl Givens comments "Early Mormonism, like Christianity itself, unfolded as a series of pivotal encounters with the Divine." [13] The many texts and spiritual books written in the last two hundred years, especially doctrinal and historical records, are numerous. As Gregory Shushan

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[10] "*Reflections on Life after Death," Liahona,* Elder Neil L. Andersen April 2021, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2021/04/united-states-and-canada-section/reflections-on-life-after-death?lang=eng.

[11] Andrew H. Hedges, Alex D. Smith, and Brent M. Rogers, eds., *Journals, Volume 3: May 1843–June 1844*, vol. 3 of the Journals series of *The Joseph Smith Papers*, ed. Ronald K. Esplin and Matthew J. Grow (Salt Lake City: Church Historian's Press, 2015), 109. Joseph Smith, in Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, and B. H. Roberts. *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints*. (Deseret News, 1902), 6:50.

[12] Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*,1.

[13] Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 1.

argues, the otherworldly and afterlife spiritual experiences underlay all the doctrines in this afterlife area.[14] Many of Joseph's experiences mirrored VTE elements even though he was in full health for most of these. Joseph saw and communicated with angels, especially Moroni, had communication with and visions of the divine and Prophets. In these visions the heavenly beings were seen to descend and ascend through tunnels or portals of light.[15] In 1832 he had an out of body experience, in the Tar and Feather Incident 1832 in Hiram Ohio. His wife Emma Hale Smith remembered this incident "his spirit seemed to leave his body, and that during the period of insensibility he consciously stood over his own body, feeling no pain, but seeing and hearing all that transpired." [16] He also saw his unbaptized and deceased brother Alvin in the spirit world.[17]

In January 1836 Smith received a vision of the celestial kingdom and saw that Alvin and his parents would someday inherit the kingdom.[18] In 1840 Smith's father, Joseph Smith Sr., lay dying and Smith Jr. discussed the doctrine of the baptism of the dead with him. Just minutes before he died, he declared that he saw Alvin. [19] So, we can see that many of Smith's visions formed the foundation of the LDS church, and these doctrines represent a more compassionate and loving approach to the previous Christian dilemma of the dire fate of the unbaptized. Smith Jr. offered a solution, the proxy baptism of the dead and other ordinances that affect those who had died before the restored Gospel was preached. Not only did this solve this dilemma of

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[14] Gregory Shushan, "The Afterlife in Early Civilizations." In *The Palgrave Handbook of the Afterlife,* ed. Yujin Nagasawa (2017): 21-40.

[15] Church of Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith in *History of the Church*, 1:30-43.

[16] Emma Hale Smith Bidamon, in *Recollections of the Pioneers of Lee County* (Inez A. Kennedy, 1893), 98.

[17] Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 254.; D&C 137:7–9.

[18] https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-joseph-smith/chapter-35?lang=eng. Teachings of Presidents of the Church: Joseph Smith Chapter 35 Redemption for the Dead.

[19] Joseph Smith Sr., quoted in Lucy Mack Smith, "The History of Lucy Smith, Mother of the Prophet," 1845 manuscript, 296, 301, Church Archives.

salvation, but it also underpinned the newly developing Temple rituals, and linked families on both sides of the Veil together across the divides of birth and death. Remember that many early Mormons were either immigrants of families that moved frequently and given this lack of belonging and grounding to a geographical area, with limited or no communication with those left behind, such a theology stressing the importance of family fulfilled a need and filed an emptiness.

These secular factors certainly influenced the attractiveness of the Church and led to the growth of converts. From their perspective they would cite being led by the Holy Ghost and having their faith confirmed by spiritual experiences. Bruce Dana lists nearly sixty separate visions experienced by Joseph Smith Jr.[20] Dana says, 'many heavenly messengers appeared to the Prophet Joseph Smith after he saw and conversed with God the Father and His Son, Jesus Christ, in 1820."[21] Smith was able to describe the other side. 'Joseph F. Smith saw the spirit world just before the Savior's arrival there. The obedient spirits "were gathered together in one place" and "filled with joy and gladness, … rejoicing together because the day of their deliverance was at hand." [22]

Even though Joseph Smith Jr. has left this Earth, his work continues on the other side of the Veil. President Brigham Young revealed this knowledge about Joseph Smith:

> Joseph Smith holds the keys of this last dispensation and is now engaged behind the Veil in· the great work of the last days. He holds· the keys of that kingdom for the last dispensation the keys to rule in the spirit-world; and he rules there triumphantly, ... and he will never cease his operations, under the directions of the Son of God, until the last ones of the children of men are saved that tan be, from Adam till now.[23]

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[20] Dana, *Prophetic Teachings,* 100-103.

[21] Dana, *Prophetic Teachings,* 99; Also, Church of Jesus Christ, Joseph Smith in *History of the Church*, 1:15-20.

[22] D&C 138:19. D&C 138:12, 15. Spencer J. Condie, "The Savior's Visit to the Spirit World," *Ensign*, July 2003, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2003/07/the-saviors-visit-to-the-spirit-world?lang=eng.

[23] Young, *Journal of Discourses*, 7:289.

Wilford Woodruff also said: "The Prophet Joseph Smith held the keys of this· dispensation on this side of the Veil, and he will hold them. Throughout the countless ages of eternity ... He went into the spirit world to unlock the prison doors and to preach the Gospel to the millions of spirits who are in darkness."[24]

Brigham Young also experienced visions and dreams. He had his own VTE. Brigham Young Camp Journal of Willard Richards entry Feb 28, 1847:

> A week last Wednesday I was taken sick suddenly and could not get back to the bed…I felt like death grappled with me. I woke. I had been where Joseph and Hyrum were, [the next life]. It is hard coming [back] to life again. I went into another world and recollected what I saw. ... Next day I was on the bed and fell asleep: I saw Joseph he sat … at a brilliant window. … I kissed him many times and asked why we were not together. He said it is all right, we cannot live together yet. He showed they were organized perfectly. Every person's heart will be perfectly prepared to receive the station organized for him [in the next life]. He was at the edge of the light. … They'll get just what they want – God wants us to be good, righteous and go to heaven. God does not want anyone to do a mean inch.[25]

His younger brother Lorenzo Dow Young (1807-1895), also had a prophetic vision aged nine. He recorded standing in an open space, seeing a carriage coming along a road that led up into the air.

> The carriage was white and brilliant with gold and the horses traveled like the wind. It was made manifest to me that the Savior was in the carriage, and that it was driven by his servant. The carriage stopped near me, and the Savior inquired where my brother Brigham was. After informing him, he further inquired about my other brothers and our father. After I had answered His inquiries, he stated that he wanted us all, but he especially wanted my brother Brigham.[26]

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[24] Woodruff, *Journal of Discourses,* 22:1333-34.

[25] Willard Richards, Willard Richards Journals and Papers, 1821-1854, vol. 17, 1846 December–1847 April, 282-85, Church History Library, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/bc9f64b9-af10-4233-b43d-8787fadaa0e6/0/281.

[26] James Amasa Little, "Biography of Lorenzo Dow Young," *Utah Historical Quarterly* 14, no. 1-4 (1946), 26, http://young.parkinsonfamily.org/john/histories/uhq-lorenzo-d-young-bio.htm. See also "The Prophetic Dream About Jesus Christ Brigham Young's Brother Had Before Finding the Church," LDS Living, June 13, 2017, https://www.ldsliving.com/the-prophetic-dream-about-jesus-christ-brigham-youngs-brother-had-before-finding-the-church/s/85615.

In the atmosphere is 19th century America, it was considered natural to have spiritual visions and it was accepted into the worldview, unlike the current societal norm of atheistic materialism. Joseph F. Smith was given a series of visions, one of which we have canonized as Section 138 of the Doctrine and Covenants. He wrote,

> As I pondered over these things which are written, the eyes of my understanding were opened, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me, and I saw the hosts of the dead, both small and great. And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality.[27]

Why VTEs Can Be Accepted as a Form of Revelation and Sharing of Knowledge

According to Givens, God reveals himself He can be personally encountered. The heavens are open to human enquiry God gives personal revelations.[28] God is human like and empathizes with us, he too was a man before he became exhaulted.[29] Bruce Dana's 2001 book *Prophetic Teachings on Death, Angels, and Heavenly Manifestations*,[30] is a good guide when reading Mormon VTEs. He describes how spirit and body are related and how death impacts the person as they enter the spirit world. He describes the structure and entities in the other realms and explains progression and hierarchies there. He shows how LDS church leaders were able to guide in doctrinal matters and answer the essential questions about where we come from and where we go after death.

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[27] D&C 138: 11-12.
[28] Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 82.
[29] Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 104-6.
[30] Dana, *Prophetic Teachings*.

The Eighty Elements – Reveal a Map of the Mormon Afterlife

The eighty elements I identified not only provide a map of the Mormon afterlife but also mirror Mormon Theology and culture. Later in this dissertation I will ask how and why this is the case. I will discuss the relationship between culture and religious experience and argue that just because the afterlife seems to be a version of Earth life, it does not imply that the experience is a delusion, or fabricated or simply wish fulfillment. Some VTE's contain multiple elements even if they are very short, while others are more detailed and contain impressions, emotions and commentary. The following short paragraph taken from BYU's Special Collections demonstrates how many elements flow through the narrative. There are themes here such as apparent death, the Veil, being guided by a messenger, seeing dead friends and family who were busy, a place of no pain or sorrow. A reluctance to return but eventual choice to return and message that it was not yet time to die.

An Example John Hatch was very ill, and family gathered at his bedside. He showed no signs of life with no breathing for one hour and he was presumed dead. Then color returned and he opened his eyes. He said he had passed through the Veil and was met by a messenger who told him that it was not time for him to die because it was before his time. He did have a choice to stay or return. Before he 'awoke' he saw his family grieving over his body. He saw people there (in the Spirit World) that he knew. They were all busy with no time to stop and talk. They just waved and passed him by. Everything there was pleasant. There was for him no sorrow, worry or pain. He hated to come back but chose to return.[31]

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[31] Recounted by Pamela Isaacson in 1962, Collection of supernatural and religious legends, BYU Special Collections, Box 6, Folder 9. This happened to Katy Gibbons Lee's GF John Hatch and patriarch at Snowflake. Story related by Mr. Merle's Uncle Quill Standifird.

Table of Elements

Below are almost eighty elements and themes found in VTEs with a chronological listing of those experienced them. This layout will allow for patterns and the evolution of ideas throughout time to be observed.[32]

A The journey.

(1) The Veil (2) Out of body and autoscopy (3) Indifference towards the body (4) Tunnel, journey, door – which can be experienced both coming and going (5) Guides and escorts for the dying and deathbed visitors (6) White Light full of love, light, peace, joy and bliss (7) Blackness and the void (8) Place of despair [33] (9) Satan

B The disembodied realm: A Place of pleasant emotions.

(10) The spirit bodies (11) Vibration and energy (12) Space time and speed of travel (13) Receiving knowledge and realizing oneness and omniscience. The web of connection (14) Telepathic communication and telepathy (15) Knowing the thoughts and feelings of other beings and forms of life. Mind reading. Meetings with the Divine: (16) The Light of God, Heavenly Father (17) Meeting Jesus (18) Holy Ghost/Holy Spirit (no Trinity…three separate Godhead figures) (19) Heavenly Mother (20) Mary Mother of Jesus (21) Meeting Prophets The Angelic realm. Angelic ancestors. (23) Angels Family Meetings & Meeting historical figures (24) Greeted by friends and family. [34](25) Seeing dead relatives and friends - including those not known to be dead (26) Age and physical wellbeing of family. Everyone is young and healthy (27)

C Life review Arriving home. Self-judging

(28) Premortal Life and returning home. (29) View of the past premortal life (30) View of the past – immersion in history since creation onwards - historical review

D Children in the spirit world, both before and after Earthly birth.

(31) Children who die in infancy and under the age of eight. (32) Miscarriages and aborted children (33) Visions of the unborn before birth on Earth

E Physical aspects of the spirit world.

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[32] Consciousness based elements include telepathy, knowledge, co-creation of landscapes, meeting other entities, life review and experience outside space/time. Universal consciousness is able to incorporate cultural co-created elements of NDEs, such as those pertaining to Mormon and Tibetan society and culturally expressed beliefs.

[33] This betrays a possible Protestant influence e.g. with non-LDS and Menet.

[34] Family is very important in LDS culture.

(34) Realness of the perceived experience and perceived realm (35) Where is it? (36) Beauty of the spirit world (37) Ineffability – inadequacy of our five senses 2. Natural aspects of the Spirit World (38) Music (39) Colors and heightened senses (40) Animals (41) Plants, trees and flowers in the spirit world (42) Planets 3. Urban areas of the Spirit World (43) Cities and buildings (44) Temples (45) Celestial City (46) Libraries (47) Genealogical work in library (47b) Link between genealogy work on both side of the Veil (48) Technology 5. Other areas of the realms (49) Dark places/Spirit Prison – Missionary work

F Society in the spirit world - family at the center/ Social Aspects of the Spirit World.

(50) Hierarchy in the spirit world and heavens (51) Moral and spiritual hierarchy is mirrored in the afterlife in different leaves and realms that match the level of the inhabitants. (52) Goal of apotheosis and progression (53) Non-Mormons in Spirit World (54) White robes [35](55) Food (56) Relatives in spirit world concern for us on Earth and do work for us Relatives in the spirit world ask for genealogical and ordinance work to be done for them on Earth by returning persons. (57) Prayer (58) Business and industry in the spirit world Busyness - Hurry to do work before the second coming and to complete ordinances. Influence of the departed on the living through the Veil. (59) Knowledge gained from the visit to the spirit world/ We all have a life plan/ progression. (60) Experiencer and other spirits able to see family on Earth from the Spirit World.

G. Returning.

(61) Returning (62) Being sent back choice agency (63) Choice to return to the body agency (64) Return party or goodbye ceremony (65) Reluctance to return (66) Called back to the body from those on Earth Priesthood blessing having the power to return people to this Earth from the Spirit World. [36](67) Experience of returning to body (68) Pain ceases when spirit leaves the body and returns when spirit returns. b) Experience of returning to body a) pain b) squeezing in c) disgust (69) Miraculous healings. "It's not your time." (70) Border. Reasons to return (71) To do service be of help, support family and children on Earth (72) Mission on Earth go back! Life Plan (73) Apocalyptic visions and prophetic views of the future[37] Personal future. National and World Future.

H After the VTE (74) Verification/ veridical event.

(75) Gifts and dreams/no Veil (76) Lost fear of death expressed (77) Joining or leaving the Church (78) Impression of the spirit to share VTE (79) Memory of the VTE remains clear, vibrant, and influential (80) Consistency of stories over time.

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[35] White robes are worn in Temples which is significant. A color of purity.

[36] Related to this is the idea that prayers and blessings (administrations) by the bedside of the sick could bring them back from death.

[37] See: Richardson, Rowe, Menet, Durham, Daybell, Fenimore, 'Spencer' in appendices.

Appendix three contains the VTE data arranged by each element, with a brief Mormon theological description and commentary. Appendix four is the most important because it links each element with a chronological list of persons who reported the element in their testimony. The first section concentrates on the experiences of Joseph Smith and Brigham Young since their position and influence is significant in the tradition. Then I list the data of ordinary Mormons set out by category, beginning with Lovisa Mack Tuttle in 1984 who reported a journey to the world of spirits through a Veil through to modern accounts published within the past year.

Stages and Patterns in VTEs

A brief glance at these 80 elements reveals distinct areas of the experience which appear to occur in a linear pattern, even though time is reported to be absent or different in this realm. The experience is akin to a journey there and back, and involves communication, meetings with other entities and impartation of knowledge. Choice or agency, an important Mormon theme is seen throughout, as in the decision to return.[38] There is the initial journey and OBE experience, meeting a guide, meeting other entities, a life review, seeing the physical landscape and urban areas, experiencing spirit world society, the return to the body and the aftermath of the experience.[39] My findings are consistent with those of other scholars who have written about this material. In *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying*, Daniel Belnap writes a chapter on Mormon afterlife beliefs. He stresses themes such as an embodied afterlife and the importance of

[38] It is rare to find any VTE involving a forced return. At most, a subtle persuasion suggestion or recommendation to return is used. Often the experiencer is shown what would occur were they to remain in the spirit world. This scenario often involves children who would miss the parent or not receive the chance to be born at all.

[39] Sometimes post-VTE dreams would contain more messages and revelations.

relationships between communities on both sides of the Veil. This includes the human relationship with the divine.[40] He argues that while ideas of heaven and hell continue from mainstream Christianity, their form and purpose differ, and he stresses "multiple localities of eternal 'glory' based on the individual's moral and ethical state."[41] This echoes the New Testament Gospel teaching, "In my Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2, KJV).

Evidence of Changes in VTE Narratives During the History of the Church

When I analyzed my data, I was looking to see if chronologically there was evidence that the narratives, taken over time, reflected changes in Mormon doctrine. It is well known that Mormon doctrines have evolved and changed over time, according to continuous revelation. E.g. Changes occurred in the later 20th century, and the old prohibitions against inclusivity were altered allowing for priesthood and Temple work among all races [42]. The ban on drinking Coca-Cola, which relates to the word of wisdom, was also reversed in 2012, although some Mormons still will not drink caffeinated sodas. Policies on marriage, ordinances, temple garment design and doctrinal issues all have changed in the two centuries of Mormon history. Thomas Alexander notes that doctrinal development has not always been a smooth and linear process and that it is often not the case that a foundational idea is built upon, but often an idea is thrown out.[43] If

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[40] Daniel Belnap, "Mormon Afterlife Beliefs and Funerary Practices," *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying*, ed. Christopher M. Moreman (Routledge, 2018), 25.

[41] Belnap, "Mormon Afterlife Beliefs," 26.

[42] Official Declaration 2, 1978.

[43] Alexander, Thomas G. "The Reconstruction of Mormon Doctrine: From Joseph Smith to Progressive Theology." *Sunstone* 5, no. 4 (1980): 15-17. Alexander differentiates between certain periods of changes in Mormon doctrinal development. 1830-35 is the basis, then 1832-1890 is the period of doctrinal reconstruction. Then 1893-

culture influences VTEs then it would be expected that the VTE narrative would reflect this. So, I had to ask these questions: Do 19th century Mormons have somewhat different experiences than are described by late 20th century Mormons? To what extent do the experiences mirror the evolution of LDS doctrines and society and changes in how Mormons think about the afterlife? Do the experiences reflect Mormon expectations even as those expectation change?

Certainly, the modern narratives are more numerous and detailed. They also tended to use modern language and references and tended to have more similarities to generic NDEs. Most Mormons do expect to see the Spirit World and know certain features of the realm and these motifs were consistently reflected. The VTEs in my own data did not deal with doctrines per se, and tended to focus on the flowers, garden, cities, colors, personalities, etc. References to a life review and genealogy are stressed more as these took on more significance post Moody for the judgement aspect, and for genealogy after its importance increased in the church in the 1900s onwards. In 1894 Wilford Woodruff announced the need for wider family research for church sealings and ordinances.[44] In 1890 the LDS Church under Woodruff also renounced polygamy in the manifesto.[45] I do not think extending genealogy work and banning polygamy it is unrelated.

1925 when most of the current doctrine is systematized. Joseph Smith's input lasts from 1830-1844. Alexander notes that there were revisions and revelations which led to developments such as the doctrine of perfectionism and eternal progression. Fluidity of doctrine is seen in areas such as the Holy Ghost, reconsidered by James E. Talmage, and Joseph Smith's ideas about the plurality of gods. Some doctrines were internalized such as the separation between Father and Jesus, the idea of man's perfectibility and eternal progression. At times in the 19th century newer and older doctrines co-existed until exegesis and revelation to leadership officialized them. Alexander notes that in the early 1900s James E. Talmage, Brigham H. Roberts, and John A. Widtsoe helped in molding the reconstruction according to the principles of continuous revelation and evolution of the Church.

[44] Wilford Woodruff, Discourse, April 8, 1894, in *The Latter-day Saints' Millennial Star*, vol. 56, no. 22 (May 28, 1894), 339. Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, "Family History and Genealogy," January 1, 2022, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/family-history-and-genealogy?lang=eng.

[45] The Woodruff Manifesto was made stricter in 1904 when Jospeh F. Smith issued the Second Manifesto making new plural marriages a reason for excommunication. It took a few years for the practice to stop because those married plurally before 1890 could still be married, the ban was on new unions. The FLDS still practices polygamy. I myself was formerly in a polygamous marriage and the church would not baptize my children under 18 years of age for this reason, even though it was Islamic polygamy in my case. Excommunication can be for murder or for teaching false doctrines, apostasy or schism.

Both polygamy and temple ordinances and sealing are institutions that relate and impact the afterlife and when one avenue was blocked, the multiple marital paths, then other ways were free to be emphasized.

In all my own data I was not able to find references to polygamy, even though this was practiced for a period in the 19th century and would have been expected to be described in the visions of the Spirit World and Celestial Kingdom. Its omittance is surprising. Alvin, Joseph Smith's brother, is seen in the Celestial kingdom, and what is fascinating is that he is both not baptized and not married. So, inconsistencies and apparent contradictions are evident. While the VTEs in my data omit talking about polygamy they do mention marriage and the importance of spouses and family. These themes are keenly stressed. Also, in the VTEs at the turn of the century onwards references to genealogy and requests for ordinances from the dead are common and of paramount importance as a theme.[46]

Polygamy was practiced to varying degrees in the 19th century and was not ubiquitous, but its purpose was spiritual and also practical.[47] As well as encouraging the procreation of children its main purpose was related to salvation, both for the as yet unborn and for the living. It was linked to the doctrine of exaltation and the idea of the establishment of Zion. In the early 20th century after the demise of plural marriage the focus shifted onto ordinances and sealings for the extended family and ancestors. Whilst eternal marriage and qualifications to enter the

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[46] Baptism for the dead was introduced in the early 1840s and endowments for the dead were performed in the St. George Temple, UT in 1877. Jace Whatcott, "Significant Temple Work Started at St. George Utah Temple," Church News, 28 May 2014, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/church/news/significant-temple-work-started-at-st-george-utah-temple?lang=eng#:~:text=In%201877%20the%20first%20endowments,form%20for%20the%20first%20time. See Also Erin E. Stiles, *The Devil Sat on My Bed : Encounters with the Spirit World in Mormon Utah*. (Oxford University Press, 2024). Chapters 3 and 4.

[47] Joseph Smith Jr. received this revelation in the early 1840s. See D&C Section 132. It was controversial and new plural unions were banned by the LDS Church in 1890.

Celestial Kingdom are still part of doctrine, the focus has shifted. More emphasis on personal obedience and agency leading to moral life choices is of importance in soteriological doctrines.[48] Divine mercy also plays a role in an individual's salvation. References to genealogy and Temple work by proxy is a main element in my VTE data, but marriage is not stressed as a theme, rather the importance of family as a whole, which mirrors the LDS focus on the family and 'covenant relationships' within the community. [49]

Women in all the VTEs are throughout still honored and revered as mothers who help birth spirit children and who raise families. [50] The role of motherhood and homemaker is still an important part of Mormon culture, even though working and educated women have always existed in the community, even from the 19th century.[51]

From a historical and sociological viewpoint, we can witness the emergence of different types of Mormonism over time. Not only is there variation cross time but between different groups within the Mormon community in any one particular time. Just as Mormon doctrines have changed throughout and after the 19th century, so even in 2024 there are different viewpoints held amongst different groups of Mormons. There have exerted pressures and disputes and fed into doctrinal changes in the past. The VTEs from the 20th century reflect the

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[48] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 45. Stiles discusses moral choice, righteousness, and moral worth and salvation.

[49] Eternal marriage is not monogamous however there are accommodations for a man who is widowed to be sealed to a second wife and so expect to see both in the afterlife. For a woman in this position there are more complex accommodations which have become more lenient over time, allowing her to whose which 'sealed' husband to be with in the afterlife. The work of D. Michael Quinn, Katherine M. Kitterman, Todd Compton and Brian C. Hales are recommended on the topic of polygamy and the afterlife., D. Michael Quinn, *The Mormon Hierarchy, Extensions of Power* (Signature Books,1997).

[50] Mason Kamana Allred, *Seeing Things : Technologies of Vision and the Making of Mormonism* (University of North Carolina Press, 2023),19.

[51] It was polygamy and the ability for many women to care for each other's children that allowed some women to go out to work in professions in the 19th century. E.g. Dr. Martha Hughes Cannon (1857-1932), first woman state senator of Utah and plural wife. Aisha Amin, "Martha Hughes Cannon: The First Woman State Senator," American Masters, March 7, 2023, https://www.pbs.org/wnet/americanmasters/martha-hughes-cannon-first-woman-state-senator-q2gf6y/15269/.

preoccupation with communication across the veil aimed at completing ordinances. The theme of spirits aiding in Temple work is noted by Mason Kamana Allred, who says that Mormonism began with visions of the dead and that this has shaped media practices such as genealogy in Mormonism.[52] She writes:

> In Latter-day Saint use, microfilm even allowed for instances of spiritual feedback, wherein spirits from beyond the veil could visit, guide, or instant message living genealogists to notify them their proxy work was valid. Good genealogist Mormons had to learn techniques of scanning, recording, zooming, and seeing with spiritual eyes. Visions of dead ancestors were tamed into feedback loops supporting a system that facilitated temple work, while also bolstering racial lineages and American belonging.

My VTE data is full of such descriptions, and it is one of the elements that distinguishes them from generic NDEs. (Elements 30-33 focus on children, elements 23-29 focus on the family and 47-48 on genealogical work. element 71 gives doing temple work as a reason to return to the body on earth). Obviously, the position of women, the organization of society and the Church have changed greatly during the past two centuries and the VTEs, although largely constant in their elements, must be read in the context of their era.

Variances within VTEs

Given natural variances amongst Mormons and their persuasions, attitudes and personalities under the Sacred Canopy of Mormonism and given the doctrine of progressive

[52] Allred, *Seeing Things*, 1.

revelation which lends fluidity of doctrines over time, one should expect these changes and differences to be reflected in VTE narratives. The more dramatic appearances of divine beings and Biblical Prophets that mark the early decades of Mormonism have now given way to a more muted 'still small voice' promptings of the Holy Ghost and legitimate revelations given by the President and General Authorities.[53] We should expect to see progressive revelation and cultural emphasis reflected in the VTEs about the Spirit World. The elements ones collected in my data are quite consistent however and since doctrine is not specifically noted, I have not noted any major differences between VTEs of different eras. The focus is on leaving the body, reentering the body, and the descriptions of the places and people seen in the Spirit World. There are differences in emphasis and some examples might be the different political views and apocalyptic views expressed by Thos. Thomas a century ago and the more recent VTEs such as those expressed by Spencer in Visions of Glory. The earlier VTEs are shorter and less detailed. The more modern tend to stray more towards the boundaries of orthodoxy in some of their implications, e.g., Julie Rowe's accounts.[54] VTEs before and after Temple work commenced in Utah after 1877, show increasing content on this aspect and as its practice and importance increases so does the theme of ordinances and genealogy. I would have expected more differences between the 19th, 20th and 21st century VTEs than is expressed in the VTE narratives in my data. Obviously great social, political and sociological changes have occurred in this period in Utah, the United States and the world. There have been doctrinal differences and sectarian differences also, and now the LDS church is a multiethnic worldwide organization,

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[53] In 2024, the 17th President of the LDS Church is Russell M. Nelson.

[54] She was excommunicated in April 2019. Mary Ann, "End-Times Visionary Julie Rowe Excommunicated," *Wheat & Tares* (blog), June 5, 2019, https://wheatandtares.org/2019/06/05/end-times-visionary-julie-rowe-excommunicated/.

with the Book of Mormon translated into 115 languages as of 2023. I believe the reason for the Near-Death type of VTEs being more uniform than expected is that they are focusing not on this earthly world which changes, but on the afterlife, which seems more constant. So, while on earth one's life situation might be very different across the decades, reports of OBEs and meeting dead relatives, or guides are repeated. Theologically it makes sense that the afterlife realm would, if it exists ontologically, would change less than earth situations.

Erin Stiles provided an explanation for the similarity in the VTE data, and it might be connected to the peculiarity of the LDS sub-culture of Utah compared to the wider and different types of non-LDS and non-Utah Mormons. Since most of my data is from LDS sources in Utah her perspective on seeing folk narratives and oral culture being more homogenous makes sense when applied to VTEs. Whilst theologians focus on texts and edits, this folk approach with its expectations of what to expect in the Spirit World are quite constant. Stiles mentions the "rich lore about and experiences of the spirit world that are aspects of everyday Mormonism." [55] She adds that stories about spirit encounters, even rare meetings with the Devil, abound in local culture in Northern Utah. Meeting spirits is reported to be both common and accepted.[56] Stiles borrow the useful term 'cultural kindling' to refer to the way the culture gives rise to interpretations of experiences.[57] Stiles uses this secular cultural explanation to argue that a similar culture gives rise to similar spiritual experiences. Now from a theological point of view, where the idea of a spiritual world is accepted by faith adherents, there is no contradiction to

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[55] Erin E. Stiles, *The Devil Sat on My Bed: Encounters with the Spirit World in Mormon Utah* (Oxford University Press, 2024), 2.

[56] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 7.

[57] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 7. The term Cultural kindling comes from Julia Cassaniti and Tanya Luhrman (2014) as Stiles explains. Julia I. Cassaniti and Tanya Marie Luhrman, "The Cultural Kindling of Spiritual Experiences," *Current Anthropology* 55, no. 10 (2014): 333-343.

appreciating the cultural role in their interpretation and narration of VTEs. Both theologians and sociologist could agree that an openness and attunement in sensitivity of spiritual things that comes from being raised in Mormon culture, can account for receptiveness and openness to VTEs. Stiles says that the area (Northern Utah) is saturated with Spirit narratives which is a result of cultural kindling which legitimizes their experiences.[58] Many Mormons are familiar with earlier and 19th century VTEs so it could also be that awareness of precedents in contact with the Spirit World influence modern 'journeys' there. In her book she focuses on eternal family ethical kinship, ancestor spirits, salvation and the eternal family which are main themes in seem to be a separate species and at other times deceased relatives.

Mormons do not exist in a bubble, and cultural and religious ideas brough in by converts and gleaned from popular culture can color ideas and expectations about angels and other aspects of the afterlife. The tendency for more of this confusion grows are Mormons mingle more with non-Mormons, use social media to share folk and spiritual ideas, and are less isolated than in the 19th century. The main theme Stiles identifies in her folk narratives of the Spirit World agree with my own findings of the VTEs, that the main theme is the shared mutual ethical responsibility to help each other toward s salvation and possible exaltation.[59] This interdependence is seen in reports of ancestor spirits appearing in the Temple, which is reported in both my VTE data and Stile's data and in mutual assistance in collecting genealogy in order to complete ordinances.[60] VTEs since the 20th century. Her reports of folk culture now tally with my VTEs in the area of family relationships. She notes: "The yet to be born, the living and the

[58] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 7.
[59] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 51-53.
[60] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 86, 88.

dead all work together in the community of Mormons within the plan of salvation."[61] As in my VTEs, she also notices the responsibilities between the living and the dead, the need for women to give birth to spirit children, and Temple work, which all has the goal of salvation.[62] VTEs do reflect orthodox teachings but the folk belief aspect and broad cultural ideas of the Spirit world, which Stiles focuses on, lead me to conclude that the folk influence might be as strong or even stronger on VTEs than orthodox texts, and that might explain their tendency to refer less to doctrinal afterlife teachings. She mentions that Benjamin Park has studied the development of ideas of angelology in Mormonism, but that ordinary people do not focus much on the differences between angels, spirits and ancestors.[63]

If I apply this idea to VTEs it could be that while more orthodox ideas of the afterlife developed, the folk ideas took on a different, perhaps more uniform character. There certainly is a confusion within the VTE narratives when identifying angels. Sometimes they seem to be a separate species and at other times deceased relatives. Mormons do not exist in a bubble, and cultural and religious ideas brough in by converts and gleaned from popular culture can color ideas and expectations about angels and other aspects of the afterlife. The tendency for more of this confusion grows are Mormons mingle more with non-Mormons, use social media to share folk and spiritual ideas, and are less isolated than in the 19th century. The main theme Stiles identifies in her folk narratives of the Spirit World agree with my own findings of the VTEs, that the main theme is the shared mutual ethical responsibility to help each other towards salvation and possible exaltation.[64] This interdependence is seen in reports of ancestor spirits appearing in

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[61] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 14.
[62] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 14.
[63] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 22-27. Also, Benjamin E. Park, "A Uniformity So Complete: Early Mormon Angelology," *Intermountain West Journal of Religious Studies* 2, no.1 (2010): 2-37.
[64] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 51-53.

the Temple, which is reported in both my VTE data and Stile's data and in mutual assistance in collecting genealogy in order to complete ordinances.[65] All types of Mormonism however are concerned with matters of life and death, and how this world and the Spirit World connect. The promise of everlasting life and a heavenly future with loved ones is a powerful and motivational message. As Douglas Davies writes, "the rise and success of Mormonism as an increasingly distinctive religious tradition can be interpreted as inextricably grounded in its conquest of death."[66]

A Close Comparison of an Older and Modern VTE

I want to conduct a brief exercise to take two model Mormon VTEs and show how theoretical concepts can be used in order to understand them. I chose to use Vincent Todd Tolman's 2003 VTE account based on his book and his numerous social media appearances and publications.[67] He was pronounced dead by EMS attendant and zipped up in a body bag and sent to the morgue. Again, an NDE does not require literal death, and merely being on the cusp can produce the experience. He had an OBE and was floating over his body witnessing the actions of al the humans in the Dairy Queen, and ambulance.[68] He found his body grotesque but at first did not recognize it as himself. [69]What he saw was later confirmed as accurate. He experienced telepathic mind reading of others including the thoughts in the mind of the youngest EMT worker and later corroborated these thoughts with the young man and verified they are

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[65] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 86, 88.

[66] Douglas J. Davies, *The Mormon Culture of Salvation* (Routledge, 2018), 4.

[67] Tolman, Vincent Todd, Lynn Taylor, and Richard Paul Evans. *The Light after Death: My Journey to Heaven and Back* (Ascendt Publishing, 2022). For more information see Tolman's website, https://livinggodslight.com/.

[68] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 23.

[69] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 23.

accurate.[70] He had a life review and saw it from the perspective of everyone else he had interacted with on Earth. He felt a warmth and brightness from a light.[71] He met a guide named Drake who wore a white robe who communicated telepathically and offered him the choice to return to his body or follow him. [72] He went with the guide and described how they floated away, accelerating through space, and moving at what seemed like an impossible speed.[73] He gained superhuman knowledge. He writes:

> He opened my mind to the immensity of just my portion of the universe, and how complex and universal the principles were that he would teach me. In that moment, I was overcome by the immensity of it all. It was a massive information download, bigger than I could absorb.[74]

Again, he refers to telepathic communication ion this spirit world realm.[75] There is no punishment. And everyone has ample chances and time to grow and develop in the 'classroom' of existence.[76] The becomes aware of an immense sphere of light in the distance.[77] This light communicates to him that *love* is important and to listen to his inner voice. i.e. his conscience or promptings of the spirit.[78] Satan exists to lead humans astray and his purpose is like resistance in the gym, to make humans stronger.[79] He meets angels, and they do not have wings. (agrees with LDS doctrine)[80] Angels surround the angry estranged souls and rescue them and help them obtain liberation from human negativity.[81] The prayers of loved ones on Earth reach those

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[70] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 30.
[71] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 35.
[72] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 37.
[73] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 38.
[74] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 37.
[75] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 38.
[76] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 39, 49, 50, 51.
[77] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 51.
[78] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 59.
[79] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 87.
[80] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 96.
[81] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 97.

trapped in anger and help them break out from self-imposed darkness and reach out to the angels for help so they can graduate higher.[82] This appears to be some sort of Spirit Prison but is not named as such. Tolman says the lesson is that we are all one, not in the Buddhist sense, but in the sense of universalist equality as God's Children.[83] Again Tolman is given teachings that represent a universalist perspective, as found in Mormonism. He writes,

No matter what name a person calls God, they can connect to God and find absolute, eternal truths, regardless of their religion… That is the whole purpose of our existence on Earth: to learn, to grow, and to make choices that bring us closer to God.[84]

Tolman conceals his Mormon faith and so cloaks this teaching in a way that does not 'out his identity' so he does not add that the Gospel is the quicker and preferred way to achieve this goal. I will not guess his motives for this concealment, perhaps he feels he can reach more readers this way and the end justifies the means. Also, not all Mormons are equally active in church and Temple activities, and some prefer to keep this private. Next, she refers to a separate realm of people "Drake gestured towards another sphere of light. As soon as my attention went to it, my consciousness went there, too. I saw an entire realm of religious people."[85] These were people who are haughty, judgmental and prejudiced because they think they are superior to non-religious people.[86] He then explored heaven with his guide.[87] He gives a classic description of the environment, sharing the amazing colors of nature, saying, "Each blade of grass was an individual entity, yet joined together to create one beautiful, powerful organism." [88] He saw a

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[82] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 97-98.
[83] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 99.
[84] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 99-100.
[85] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 101.
[86] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 101.
[87] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 102.
[88] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 104.

flower and then a beetle and with both felt absolute love, appreciation and harmony with them and saw them as God's beautiful creations. It was an immersive experience which I want to quote here as it is important:

> Perhaps the most peculiar thing I had noticed since I arrived was that everything, I had encountered had a consciousness. Everything was alive. That's when it dawned on me that all the individual consciousnesses that I could feel—from the grass, the flowers, the water, the tree, the insect, and the buildings were actually extensions of God. [89]

Then Drake told him that he had a piece of God's consciousness inside him too.[90] Again another Mormon element is shared when Tolman says he became aware of the prayers of his brother on Earth, praying for his return and healing.[91] This is obviously a Mormon priesthood blessing, which is believed to have the power to influence recovery and return to a healed state. He writes,

> I COULD HEAR THE VOICE of my brother speaking from the physical world, as if he was speaking directly into my ear. He was saying a special prayer -what we called a "blessing" in my religion—over my body in the hospital. He stated that I would become whole, and that I would come back. As he completed the blessing with an "amen," something that felt like a lasso of energy wrapped around me and pulled me back.[92]

Tolman says then very soon after this blessing he recovered and awoke from his coma, healed and well. This amazing return from the dead event reminds me of another of my model VTEs intervention blessing stories; that of Lorenzo Snow who is credited with raising Ella Jensen from the dead-on March 3rd, 1891.[93] The last Mormon element is found in his transformation and a discovery found linking the unknown guide Drake to his genealogy. He

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[89] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 105, 109.
[90] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 109.
[91] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 115.
[92] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 115.
[93] Talking Scripture, "Ella Jensen Raised From the Dead by Lorenzo Snow," LDS Scripture Teachings, December 13, 2016, https://www.ldsscriptureteachings.org/2016/12/ella-jensen-raised-from-the-dead-by-lorenzo-snow/.

went to a Mormon gathering that celebrated the pioneers in the 19th century, and he saw pictures of the settlers. He saw a picture of his spirit guide and it was an identical match to his memory, but the name was Charles D. Cazier, not Drake. He writes, "The next day, Andrea and I approached my grandmother. "Grandma," I asked, "did you know a Charles Cazier?" "Of course," she said. "That's great-grandpa Drake…He went by Drake? That's what everyone called him." [94]

Now this seems to have shocked Tolman and given him confirmation of his beliefs and VTE, however it is not surprising to me, so many VTEs involve meeting deceased ancestors." Tolman's VTEr is both very modern and yet classically Mormon. It contains many of the elements, which I underlined, such as an OBE, telepathy, seeing different realms, seeing the beauty of plants and animals, the speed of travel, receiving knowledge, learning the purpose of life, and being returned to a body. It is also lacking some key Mormon elements such as seeing the Spirit world in more physical terms and meeting a 'light' rather than Jesus. He may or may not have diluted or described more generically some of the Mormon elements in order to publish a generic NDE type book that disguised his identity as LDS. I am not going to second-guess his motives or descriptive writing choices, but this example contains enough themes to illustrate oft repeated and classic elements of the near-death experience. One of more prominent themes is that of consciousness following his attention, mind to mind communication, a feeling of unity and oneness with others, love, and light. There are other entities such as deceased souls, Satan, and angels. There is the idea of the power of prayer to bring back the dead. There is the idea of a life review from all perspectives and the lack of judgement, with self-imposed exile from God instead. The ideas in part 2 and 3 about the role of non-local consciousness, love and

[94] Tolman, *Light after Death,* 142.

compassion, and our inner self being related to God, or our consciousness being part of a great consciousness, are described here. Whilst not described in Buddhist terms, he was in a type of Bardo, seeing the levels of other Bardo Beings, each in their place due to their own attitudes and choices. He is related to the light of *Dharmakāya* but here retains a separate identity. Overall, the role of consciousness and telepathic relationships with other forms of consciousness is what stands out to me.

Now compare this to another model VTE such as that of Lorenzo Dow Young (1807-1895), brother of Brigham Young, who as a nine-year-old in 1816 had a series of visionary dreams, one in which he saw and spoke to the Savior Jesus passing him by in a magnificent carriage.[95] Then recovering after a log accident, he saw 'two beautiful seraph like beings at the foot of his bed, the size of children, singing clothed in white and heavenly."[96] Soon after in 1926 he had another vision or VTE.

It is crucial to note here that Young's experience was written in the years after the death of Joseph Smith in 1844.[97] It was also edited by his wife Harriet, which means it may not always be guaranteed to be an uncomplicated primary source. Young's visions, including his 1816 and 1826 experiences, occurred before the Book of Mormon was written, and before the Restoration of the Church in 1930. Young was baptized with his family members in 1832. Leonard Arrington

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[95] Utah Historical Quarterly Volume 14, Number 1-4, 1946.26, https://issuu.com/utah10/docs/volume_14_1946/208.

[96] Utah Historical Quarterly Volume 14, Number 1-4, 1946. 29-31, https://issuu.com/utah10/docs/volume_14_1946/208.

[97] His Diary was written between 1846 and 1847 and most of it was edited when transcribed by his wife Harriet Page Wheeler Decker Young. Lorenzo Dow Young, and Harriet Page (Wheeler) Decker Young. "Lorenzo D. Young Diary, 1846-1848," edited by Robert Dwyer, Manuscript.1848. (Note: Mostly written by his wife, Harriet Page Wheeler Decker Young. "Utah Historical Quarterly" 14(1946): 25-132.)Reprinted as: "Diary of Lorenzo Dow Young," Issuu, n.d., https://issuu.com/utah10/docs/volume_14_1946/s/69465. See Also Little, James A., Lorenzo Dow Young, and Harriet Page Wheeler Young. *Biography and Diary of Lorenzo Dow Young*. *Utah Historical Quarterly* (Utah State Historical Society, 1946).

noted that "It is a remarkable fact that all of Brigham Young's immediate family became Mormons, and all remained loyal, practicing Mormons throughout their lives."[98] This vision was interpreted as a gift from God.

Even though his visions occurred years prior to Mormon influences, both show similarity with the vision of Nephi who was first taught by the Spirit of the Lord and then by an angelic heavenly guide.[99] Young saw the Lord in the earlier vision and was guided by an angel in the second. Similarities with Nephi might be mere coincidence, or it might be because in the 19th century narratives of heaven and angels were part of folk culture.[100] The complexity of the origin of Mormon cultural views of heaven and angels, which are set against a general American religious background, as well as Church and scriptural influences later on, must be taken into account. Young's visions whilst occurring in a pre-Mormon period, were part of this general background of American thought, and when written at a later date could perceivably contain unconscious Mormon biases or language in the retelling of the narrative. Since his wife edited the diary, here is more opportunity for these nuances to creep in to recollections of visions. Usually VTE narratives are accurate, but there is always the possibility of memories being colored, and narratives or diaries taking on expressions that are culturally conditioned. Nevertheless, Since Young is a respected Church leader his visions fall under the umbrella of "Mormon", like those other VTEs that occurred to people who shirted in their religious affiliation, and whose ties to the Church came before, during or after their experience.[101]

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[98] Arrington, Leonard J. *Brigham Young : American Moses*. First edition. (Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1985), 20.

[99] 1 Nephi:11-14, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/1-ne/11?lang=eng.

[100] The idea of a guide in the heavens and otherworlds is ancient. The Greeks called this figure the psychopomp. In Greek ψυχοπομπός, *psychopompós* are the guides of souls after death as they enter new realms.

[101] VTEs have encouraged people to join the LDS church, or even leave it, or even become apostates.

On a similar note, Lorenzo Young's visions are not unique in this time period. It is well known that Joseph Smith Sr. and others had 'visions' before Mormonism was founded. Other recollections of visionary memories, also written at a later date, contain echoes of Mormon ideas. One example is Lucy Mack Smith's[102] references to her husband's visions, in her 1853 biography of her son, in which Joseph Sr.'s 1811 dream vision resembles Lehi's vision of the tree of life in the Book of Mormon.[103] This biography was dictated to Martha Jane Coray in the winter of 1944-45. The similarities could be a coincidental similarity, the work of the Spirit, or a rendition clouded by Mormon perspectives. [104]Indeed, Brigham Young took exception to this book and condemned it so not everyone was in agreement. Lehi's dream is an important passage in the Book of Mormon, and has been referred to by many church leaders, such as Hugh W. Nibley, [105] Indeed Kevin Christensen suggests that Lehi's dream represents an otherworldly journey and that other passages in the Book of Mormon show similarities with NDEs, most notably the passage concerning Alma when he came 'nigh unto death'.[106] He notes that these visions attracted converts to Mormonism and indeed it is contact with the divine and otherworldly realms that give religion its depth, its *raison d être*, and its compelling allure. It is

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[102] Lucy Mack Smith 1775-1856.

[103] Smith, Lucy, George Albert Smith, and Samuel W. Richards, *Biographical Sketches of Joseph Smith the Prophet, and His Progenitors for Many Generations* (Liverpool: Published for O. Pratt, by S.W. Richards, 1853).

[104] Lucy Smith, and Lavina Fielding Anderson, *Lucy's Book: A Critical Edition of Lucy Mack Smith's Family Memoir* (Signature Books, 2001), https://www.fairlatterdaysaints.org/answers/Lucy_Mack_Smith/History. Book of Mormon. Nephi: 8:5-38. While similarities could be purposely contrived this explanation is possible, but it is more likely that unconscious connections and influences clouded narratives, rather than willing deceit.

[105] Hugh W. Nibley, *An Approach to the Book of Mormon,* 3d ed., vol. 6 in *The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley* (Deseret Book and F.A.R.M.S., 1988), 253-64. See Book of Mormon. Nephi: 8:5-38. Also, Christensen, Kevin. ""Nigh unto Death": NDE Research and the Book of Mormon." *Journal of Book of Mormon Studies*. Vol.2 No.1.(1993):1-31.

[106] Book of Mormon Mosiah 27:8 and Alma 36:10, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/book-of-mormon-stories/chapter-6-lehis-dream?lang=eng. Also, Christensen, Response to David Wright, 1-31. Also, David A. Bednar, 'Lehi's Dream: Holding Fast to the Rod'. *Ensign*, 24 October 2011, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/ensign/2011/10/lehis-dream-holding-fast-to-the-rod?lang=eng.

important to bear in mind therefore, given these similarities, when the vision occurred first, that reminiscing one's vision or retelling the visions of others might be colored or embellished or enhanced through a Mormon lens, even if this was an unconscious process.

In this dissertation I have contained must VTEs and their elements to the appendices, but I think it is important to see the flow of at least one in full. There is no medical way to know Young's state of health during his experiences, but it the main one quote below was in a dream, an altered state of consciousness, and again, literal death is not necessary for an NDE. It is quoted below. Lorenzo Dow Young wrote,

> In a moment, I was out of my body and fully conscious of the change. I was sensible that I had passed through what we call death. I felt and acted as naturally as I had done in the body, with all my sensations as complete without as with it. At once a heavenly guide was by my side dressed in the purest white.[107] -- For a short time, I remained in the room where lay my body. My sister Fanny, who was living with me, and my wife, were weeping bitterly over my death. I sympathized with and desired to comfort them in their grief. I realized I was under the direction of the man who was by me and begged of him the privilege of speaking to them. He replied that he could not grant it. My guide, for so I will call him, said "Now let us go." -- Space seemed annihilated. Apparently, we went up and almost instantly were in another world, of the magnitude of which I formed no conception. It was filled with innumerable hosts of beings as naturally human as those among whom I had lived. "All sorts of people were intermingled, and some of them I recognized as acquaintances in the world I had just left. My guide informed me that they had not yet arrived at their final abiding place. Their surroundings and appearance indicated they were in a state of expectancy, and anxiously awaiting some event of considerable importance to them." "I looked down a distance which to me appeared incomprehensible and gazed on a vast region filled with multitudes of intelligences. I saw everything with the most minute distinctness, and the vast multitudes of people seemed extremely miserable. "These," said my guide, "are they who have rejected the means of salvation that were placed within their reach, and in that way have brought upon themselves the condemnation you behold." "The expression of the countenances of these sufferers was clear and distinct, and conveyed to me a consciousness that no one but themselves were to blame for their forlorn condition. This scene affected me so much that I could not refrain from weeping. "Again, my guide said, 'Now let us go.'" "In a moment we were at the gate of a beautiful city, which was opened, and we passed in. I cannot describe its beauty and grandeur. It was clothed in the purest light I had ever

[107] Scot Facer Proctor, "A Little-Known Glimpse into the Spirit World," September 13, 2018, https://latterdaysaintmag.com/a-little-known-glimpse-into-the-spirit-world/#_edn8.

beheld, brilliant but not glaring nor unpleasant." "My guide rather hurried me on through this place to another still higher but connected with it. It was still more beautiful and glorious than what I had seen, with an extent and magnificence incomprehensible to me. -- My guide pointed to a mansion of wonderful perfection and beauty, clothed with fire and intense light. It appeared to be a fountain of light from which emanated brilliant scintillations of glory, but I could form no conception of the extent of these emanations. Said my guide, 'That is where God resides." -- He permitted me to enter this glorious city but a short distance and, without speaking, motioned that we would retrace our steps…We were soon in the adjoining city, where I met my mother and a sister who died when six or seven years old. These I recognized at once. After mingling with the pure and happy beings of this place a short time, my guide again said, "Let us go." -- When we were through the gate by which we had entered the city, my guide said, "Now we will return." -- I could distinctly see the world from which we started, but at a vast distance below us. It looked cloudy and dark. I was filled with sadness, I might say horror, at the idea of returning there, for at first, I had hoped to stay in that heavenly place I had so long desired to see. Up to this time the thought had not occurred to me that I should be required to return. --I pleaded with my guide to let me remain. He replied that I must return and take my body, for I was only permitted to visit these heavenly cities before I had filled my mission in yonder world. He promised me if I was faithful to the grace of God which would be imparted to me, if I would bear a faithful testimony to the inhabitants of the Earth of a sacrificed and risen Savior and of His atonement for man, in a little time I should be permitted to return and remain." "To me the circumstances, the words, and the spirit that accompanied them were real and I was comforted and inspired with faith. I accepted the great mission that was then placed upon me and have never ceased to realize its responsibilities. -- We returned to my house where I found my body, apparently dressed for burial. With great reluctance I took possession of it to resume the avocations of life and endeavor to fill the mission I had received. I awoke and found myself in bed, where I lay and meditated the remainder of the night on what had been shown me. --Call it a dream, a vision, or what I may, it was as real to every sense of my being as anything I have passed through. The memory of this [vision] is still clear and distinct, after the lapse of over fifty years with their many changes. [108]

This vision contains many VTE elements before the doctrines were even established! His vision occurred before the LDS church was founded and before he was baptized. Here are some of the elements described: an OBE, continuation of consciousness and awareness out of body, autoscopy from above and witnessing the living weeping over him, a guide dressed in white,

[108] It was written by his wife Harriet Page Wheeler Decker Young on the Journey from Nauvoo to Salt Lake City 1846-8. Utah Historical Society, "Diary of Lorenzo Dow Young", *Utah Historical Quarterly,* Vol. 14, No. 1-4,1946, https://issuu.com/utah10/docs/volume_14_1946/s/69523.

(like Drake in Tolman's VTE), leaving with a guide and speedy travel to another realm, (just like Tolman's journey), arriving at an incomprehensible otherworld filled with other beings, some who are miserable and some who are in a happy and good state (like Tolman). He describes beautiful buildings and cities bathed in light. He meets deceased relatives. He did not want to return to Earth but was urged to complete his Earthly mission. He reluctantly returned to his body.

The memory of this heavenly journey is still distinct and clear. Both Young and Tolman felt the need to share this experience, preach the message of love and coming to God in their life, and become active in their communities to spread the gospel. Both stories, even though there is a 177-year gap, are remarkably similar in terms of the key elements and the ambiance of the experience. Both experiences are life changing and lead to a lifetime devoted to spirituality. Both attest to the survival of conscious awareness after death.

Data Analysis: Patterns, Commonalities and Differences. Themes & Comparisons

Whilst analyzing the VTEs I aim to avoid personal judgment, and rationalization and to let the voices of the experiences, the contents of the VTEs speak for themselves. This is the phenomenological method, to let the elements of an experience at face value paint the picture. Now some scholars such as Steven T, Katz argued that there are no unmediated experiences.[109] I believe that VTEs are pre-linguistic at the gut level of the experience, but that later when the experiencers try to put the ineffable into language if accrues a layer of cultural interpretation.

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[109] Steven T. Katz, "Language, Epistemology, and Mysticism." *Mysticism and Philosophical Analysis* (1978), 26.

While it is true that the VTE's describe a very Mormon and physical Spirit World similar to aspects of Mormon society on Earth, one cannot assume that the experiencer hallucinated the entire experience. It could be that the otherside presented itself in a way that the experiencer would understand, Just as I would speak French to a French guest in my home. It is possible that the Spirit World actually "exists" in ontological independence of the Earthly visitor.[110] There are multiple philosophical possibilities so one would be wise not to make any assumptions. I would agree with Katz that in terms of universal afterlife experiences, which involve different characters and culturally specific elements that there is a correlation between themes in different religions and the mysticism of different religions.[111] This is why Mormons and Buddhists see different entities. However, I do not assume that the different elements are caused and created by those of different religions, although this is possible, and I think a more complicated process of co-creation in religious experiences and multiplicities of Otherworlds is another possibility, a suggestion which I will examine later in this dissertation.

The bottom line is that all experiencers, whatever the faith background, meet entities, see a light, see gardens and flowers and colors, have OBE's, encounter telepathy and experience a journey with a return to the body, and that these basic elements seem to be universal, apart from more specific descriptions that color in the experience. Not all experiencers have to have all elements of the experience, but all experiences have some elements. Some experiences are brief and some very detailed.

When one reads the VTE testimonies and compares them to other generic NDEs the "Mormonness" is so pronounced that one asks if there evidence of cultural coloring over the

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[110] This is what Mormons believe. That the physical Spirit World exists as described, literally.

[111] Steven T. Katz, "The 'Conservative' Character of Mysticism." in *Mysticism and Religious Traditions*, ed. Steven T. Katz (Oxford University Press, 1983), 40, 51.

experience? Sometimes it has been argued in religious experience that there is a core experience which is overlain with a cultural interpretation. Then there are arguments from a perennialist perspective. In the central section of this dissertation, I will revisit this question. I found that the very experience itself could not be separated from any underlying core.

My intuition is that whatever caused the experience, it presented to the individual in the way it was experienced. Two possibilities are that the person saw what was expected and projected the experience, which raises philosophical implications about the independent reality of the experience; alternatively, whatever reality was 'behind' the experience might have presented the afterlife scenario in a way that would be understood and accepted by the person, given their cultural location. Ultimately the source and explanation of the VTE is mysterious and beyond proof. While some speculations seem more sound or probable than others to me, that might only reflect my own presuppositions, prejudices, and preferences.

This corpus of NDE testimonies can be viewed from various perspectives and socio-religious locations, which includes the attitude and interpretation of the official view of the authorities of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which represents many but not all Mormons. It appears that one's own personal views before one encounters VTEs shape one's reaction to them, but more than that, one's reaction sometimes reveals more about the reader than the person testifying! Whilst academics struggle to maintain objectivity, the fact that this cohesive body of traditions has remained largely unexplored and ignored by academia expose the trepidation of exploring what is viewed as the supernatural in Western culture.

The Mormon VTE narratives and testimonies are organized and categorized them under multiple elements as can be seen in the data appendix. It is obvious that these elements can be compared to those of generic NDEs and resemble tables of categories proposed by Bruce

Greyson, Kenneth Ring and Raymond Moody. Yet, there are specific Mormon elements that are unusual, and which led me to compile a specifically Mormon table of elements that correspond to Mormon Theology, with their own particular features unique to this culture and faith. In my fieldwork reading hundreds of experiences both Mormon and non-Mormon, I noted anomalies, unique descriptions, and was able to tally consistency and establish a baseline Mormon against the baseline worldwide generic. It cannot be stressed enough that what is omitted and not mentioned in Mormon VTE's has great significance. For example, visions which include persons from other cultures or religions is not mentioned except in a couple of my examples. There is no Yama, no Buddhas, no Muslim warriors, no people from other eras in other parts of the world, not even other types of Christians. It appears at face value that Mormons go to a heaven full of other Mormons, usually meeting friends and family members or ancestors, but not other types of human beings. There are no references to extraterrestrials, even though the possibility of life other planets figures in the theology. Also, there is hardly a mention of the devil, and just a few reports mention malevolent demonic forces or bad angels, but hellish VTE's are very rare, even though the idea of a Spirit Prison is acknowledged. This fits in with Mormon cosmology and the ability to progress in the Spirit world, and the idea that Mormons are usually protected from evil forces.

Most VTEs seem to reinforce and to promote the faith there and there is a dearth of negative NDEs recorded other than Alma's near-death experience, when he was in hell and possibly Elder Parley Pratt. [112] In the Book of Mormon Alma has a VTE like experience.

> And it came to pass that I was racked up with torment while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins. I cried out with all my heart: O Jesus……and what marvelous

[112] A few modern VTEs have hellish experiences. See Sarah LaNelle Menet, Betty Eadie, Angie Fenimore and Elder Parley Pratt. (JeffMara Podcast, "Jesus Downloaded Her Life During Her Near Death Experience," October 21, 2021, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bWEAaqq2AbI&t=248s).

> light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy…[113] And it came to pass that I was racked up with torment while I was harrowed up by the memory of my many sins. Yea, I did remember all my sins and iniquities, for which I was tormented with the pains of hell; yea, I saw that I had rebelled against my God, and that I had not kept his holy commandments. Yea, and I had murdered many of his children, or rather led them away unto destruction; yea, and in fine so great had been my iniquities, that the very thought of coming into the presence of my God did rack my soul with inexpressible horror. And now, for three days and for three nights was I racked, even with the pains of a damned soul. And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more. And oh, what joy was in my soul, and what marvelous light I did behold; yea, my soul was filled with joy as exceeding as was my pain! And I said: O Jesus, thou Son of God, have mercy on me, who am in the gall of bitterness, and am encircled about by the everlasting chains of death. And now, behold, when I thought this, I could remember my pains no more; yea, I was harrowed up by the memory of my sins no more. [114]

Alma had been a wicked young man who went through a powerful conversion experience that was life changing. This is like so many generic NDEs when those in darkness call out to Jesus and are rescued by the light.

What is important to note is not just what LDS VTE's contain when compared to NDEs but what they omit or do not emphasize. Once of these is the idea of a barrier of not return which often appears as a river or mountain range. As mentioned, analysis of data involves not just focuses on what is seen but also on what is not seen, and what is absent. Mormon VTEs might refer to meeting Jesus or even in rarer cases Heavenly Father, and these divine figures do shine with light, however they are not described as "Beings of Light" into which is absorbed in ecstasy. This theme of melding into the Oneness of Universal Consciousness or "The Source" is absent.

Mormon Theology and VTEs and Spirit World descriptions are very anthropomorphic, androcentric, physical and their geography is literal and solid. Heavenly Father and Jesus are

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[113] John Saint John *Tunnel of Light* (Tate Publishing, 2008), 89. Also, Alma 36:12-19.
[114] Alma 36:12-19.

separate personages, and all humans are separate, although everyone is part of a close knit and often blood related community. This is not the esoteric, nonphysical mysterious oneness of New Age descriptions where ego is dissolved. It is possible that both scenarios exist in actuality, but my point here is that in the case of Mormon VTEs, there is a fully Mormon afterlife experience.

In Mormon VTE's, rather than being told they cannot do deeper or further, or pass a point of no return, agency and choice is emphasized so those who come back to tell about the experience have chosen to. Logically there is no need for a barrier in the Mormon situation. They have already arrived in the spirit world, which is where they will stay until the Final Judgment, and only after this time will they progress to Paradise. In non-Mormon NDEs, the scenario is that the experiencer is in a temporary border place, and the gates of heaven are barred to those destined to return. So, the idea of a barrier or border would have no place in the cosmology and narrative of the Mormon spirit world experience. It appears that what transpires in the experience is logical and fits with expectations and theologies. Sometimes similar themes are there. Seeing dead relatives is a universal theme, however the emphasis on family is significant in Mormon VTEs. While many report seeing Jesus, or even Heavenly Father, they are portrayed as brother and father, and much of the joy is simply to be with family. The Divine is more familiar and 'ordinary' as well as anthropological than other types of NDEs. Another striking feature, already mentioned, is the absolute and unquestioned physicality of the spirit world with the emphasis on physical objects, clothes, and bodies. It is not a mental realm. There are some supernatural elements such as telepathy, omniscience and speed of travel but these are just some of the divine attributes that spirits share.

One aspect of the VTE's that struck me was the important place afforded to women and children which reflects their importance in society. The cohesiveness and place of family is

recognized outside the community. McDannell and Lang Modern Heaven 137, says that the Mormon faith is the greatest proponent on the modern perspective on heaven, emphasizing the nearness and similarity of the other world to our own, and arguing for the eternal nature of love family progress and work.[115] A notable aspect of Mormon VTEs was that some elements were related to the gender of the experiencer, which mirrors the roles of priesthood holder and mother respectively. Half my examples of VTEs in the appendices are from females. Since family and marriage are core Mormon values and part of the Plan of Salvation and the concept of eternal marriage and families, this is hardly surprising. Gender mattered more in VTEs than in generic NDEs perhaps because one's gender and hence one's social role is significant on Earth for Mormons. There is little difference in the quality and elements in VTEs based on gender. However, the gender roles of Mormon society are mirrored in the afterlife and women played a pivotal role in the community which is continued on the other side of the Veil.

Women's Perspectives

Jennifer McFarlane-Harris and Emily Hamilton-Honey wrote that "Mormon women ardently insisted on reshaping the world, both in their own private sphere(s) and in public life. They supported religious pluralism, advocated for social reform and civic participation, and crafted their own utopian visions of human families that would ultimately become heavenly ones."[116] They had their own theologies that emphasized the family, their place in the home and in public, the relief society and place in the afterlife. McFarlane-Harris calls these utopian

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[115] Colleen McDannell and Bernhard Lang, *Heaven: A History* (Yale University Press, 1988).

[116] Jennifer McFarlane-Harris and Emily Hamilton-Honey, introduction to *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers and Theologies of the Afterlife: A Step Closer to Heaven*, ed. Jennifer McFarlane-Harris and Emily Hamilton-Honey (Routledge, 2021), 8.

communities they envisioned, 'visions of utopia on Earth and in the afterlife' driven by 'religious passion.' [117]

Even the 19th century practice of polygamy was geared towards the entry of more women with their husbands into the future celestial kingdom. The Spirit world as seen in the VTEs can be seen in the light of this author's observations: "Their attempts at creating ideal communities on Earth were one path to fulfilling God's commands, preparing for Christ's return, or creating a more just society on Earth. Members of these communities were intentionally working to invent an ideal society, either in the name of God or on the basis of political principles— and sometimes both— that they saw as crucial to the reform of the nation. democratic and egalitarian influence/ religious freedom to all."[118] Zachary McLeod Hutchins discusses Belinda Marden Pratt's heaven which he argues is 'an extension of her present circumstances in a plural marriage' and he explains that after death her family will be transplanted too, and her social and biological roles will continue there.[119] Hutchins describes Pratt's vision that women would continue childbearing in the afterlife without pain or death. I think this is an important observation in the argument that social context and gender identity, expectations and roles influence the content of VTE visions.

Amy Easton-Flake points out that women bridge the private and public sphere in 19th century Mormon culture. I would add that this continues today, where a more conservative lifestyle and the role of motherhood and homemaker is still more prevalent or valued than in other parts of American society. VTEs are private experiences but become 'public' as they are shared. Easton- Flake discusses the poems of women in The *Woman's* Exponent Magazine of

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[117] McFarlane-Harris, *Nineteenth-Century American Women,* 8.
[118] McFarlane-Harris, *Nineteenth-Century American Women,* 14.
[119] McFarlane-Harris, *Nineteenth-Century American Women,* 174.

the Relief Society and how they contribute to afterlife theology, and she emphasizes the domesticated nature of the poems. She mentions that in the Women's exponent, a female owned journal published between 1872 and 1914, over four hundred poems mention the afterlife. Mormon women have prized literacy and share in the general culture of writing letters, journals, and publishing materials. Women's theologies of this period, she says, reflect domesticity in She mentions that in the Women's exponent, a female owned journal published between 1872 and 1914, over four hundred poems mention the afterlife. Mormon women have prized literacy and share in the general culture of writing letters, journals, and publishing materials. Women's theologies of this period, she says, reflect domesticity in heaven, and describe it as a place where friends and family reunite and live as they did on Earth, in society.[120] She notes that there is room for an anthropomorphic Heavenly Father and Jesus in the heavenly family, as elder relatives.[121] She argues that Mormon women did not passively accept theologies but actively engaged with them, with their view of premortality including a Heavenly Mother and Father rearing them, as is seen in the poem of Eliza R. Snow, 1845, popularizing the doctrine of a Heavenly Mother.[122] In contrast, the poems of women focus less on the power and hierarchy of heaven. [123] The afterlife is seen by women as a homecoming to family. [124]

Women's VTEs consistently show a similar perspective to these poems, involving reunions with deceased relatives, especially children. The idea that families are eternal, 'families are forever' whose bonds cannot be broken by death is a significant feature exemplified in the VTEs. From the 1840's Temple sealings guaranteed family relationships would continue in the

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[120] McFarlane-Harris, *Nineteenth-Century American Women,* 190.
[121] McFarlane-Harris, *Nineteenth-Century American Women,* 194.
[122] McFarlane-Harris, *Nineteenth-Century American Women,* 196.
[123] McFarlane-Harris, *Nineteenth-Century American Women,* 197.
[124] McFarlane-Harris, *Nineteenth-Century American Women,* 202.

afterlife and continue across the Veil of death, but women's poetry did not emphasize the role of sealings in the progression of humans to divinity, apotheosis, or reaching the celestial kingdom, nor was polygamy, which was rescinded in 1890, a feature of these poems. [125] Monogamy in the afterlife is portrayed instead. [126] Also, in 1894 a change from "being adopted' by prominent church members, to being sealed to biologically related kin or spouses was adopted. [127] Givens explains that collectively these announcements dramatically altered the language and aspiration of Mormon soteriology by shifting the focus from the heavenly family…to the orbit of the nuclear family, … from world building to character sanctifying. [128] She provides an insight into Mormon women's lived religion, their visions of the afterlife, and what motivated Mormon women to seek a place in God's heavenly kingdom."[129] Like the VTEs in this dissertation, these poems describe a physical anthropocentric afterlife with anthropocentric divine figures, emphasizing eternal progression towards theodicy, all ideas in accord with Mormon doctrines.

My List of Eighty Emic Elements and Generic Etic Scales of Elements and Comparison

The most common themes and elements listed in the 'appendix of elements' are considered alongside the variables of age, gender, social location, era, culture, and other influential circumstances. A statistical picture emerges, an archetypal Mormon NDE description which has implications for worldwide generic experience. It is by comparing the local and seeing elements in common that a universal theme can be seen. By weighing the local against the universal, more understanding of the phenomenon from various perspectives can be elucidated.

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[125] McFarlane-Harris, *Nineteenth-Century American Women,* 198.
[126] McFarlane-Harris, *Nineteenth-Century American Women,* 200.
[127] McFarlane-Harris, *Nineteenth-Century American Women,* 201.
[128] Givens, Wrestling the Angel, 306, 289.
[129] McFarlane-Harris, *Nineteenth-Century American Women*, 189.

E.g., meeting relatives, seeing the light, crossing the Veil, seeing souls choose parents and their birth family, meeting relatives, sharing the gospel as missionaries visiting Spirit Prison.

Near-Death Studies has developed some scales that list typical features: feelings of leaving the body, a more alert and highly functioning mind and perception, travel through a tunnel toward a bright light, a sense of peace, joy and feeling blissful love, access to unlimited knowledge, a life review, premonitions of the future and meetings with family, friends and religious figures.[130] There have been various attempts to apply scale to NDEs which try to measure the elements and phases of the experiences in order to analyze them. These scales accept the NDE reports as belonging to one phenomenon. However, I would add that some of these features, such as OBEs, can also be seen in other types of anomalous experiences in meditative states, holotropic breathwork, alien abduction reports, remote viewing and astral travel reports, shamanistic journeying and in psychedelic trips.

While I appreciate the need for scales because they help in sorting and comparing different experiences, their application is arbitrary and limited. No matter how good the scale is it only helps describe and categorize experiences into groups. Scales can help identify the most frequent and impactful elements also. However, scales by themselves do NOT EXPLAIN the causes for NDEs. So, my own VTE table of eighty features whilst important is only the first step in the exercise. An explanation of the experiences is still required.

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[130] Bruce Greyson, "The Near-Death Experience Scale: Construction, Reliability, and Validity." *The Journal of Nervous And Mental Disease.* 171, no. 6 (1983): 369-375. – Bruce Greyson, "The Near-Death Experience Content (NDE-C) Scale: Development And Psychometric Validation." *Consciousness and Cognition* 86 (2020): 103049.

Raymond Moody outlined fifteen NDE characteristics in his book *Life after Life* 1975.[131] (ineffability, hearing about their death, feelings of peace, noise such as buzzing, or music, a tunnel or dark space, OBE, meeting otherworldly beings or ancestors etc., a loving Being of Light, life review, a border, coming back, telling others, aftereffects on lives and corroboration with others that verify events that could not be known through normal perceptions.) Carol Zaleski 1987 calls this a template for measuring NDEs.[132]

Scales to measure NDEs

In 1983 Bruce Greyson of the University of Virginia developed a splendid rigorous quantitative measurement scale containing eighty elements factored into thirty-three questions to ask experiencers. [133] The elements were clustered into areas of affective states, thought processes, perceptual content, bodily sensations, and other miscellaneous items. Some of the thirty-three questions involved "time stopped', feeling of cosmic unity, being in another realm, brilliant light, sudden understanding, ESP, future visions, borer of no return, a tunnel, vivid senses. Areas of inquiry broached the cognitive, affective paranormal and transcendental aspects of the experience. The results of interviewing sixty-seven persons, of balanced, varied genders and ages at the time of the experience, revealed that age, gender, revealed, as in other studies, that there were no correlational differences. Nor did the amount of time since the NDE seem to affect the clarity of its recall to memory. His scale, says Greyson, has proved to be valid and reliable and is recommended for clinical usage in the medical field.[134] In 2022 an updated paper

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[131] Raymond A. Moody, *Life after Life: The Investigation of a Phenomenon. Survival of Bodily Death* (Bantam Books, 1975).

[132] Carol Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys: Accounts of Near-Death Experience in Medieval and Modern Times* (Oxford University Press, 1988), 103.

[133] My list was compiled independently and then compared afterwards. It is a coincidence we both arrived at 80. Bruce Greyson, "The Near-Death Experience Scale: Construction, Reliability, and Validity." *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease.* 171, no. 6 (1983): 369-375, 373.

[134] Greyson, Near-Death Experience Scale, 369-375. 373.

revisited the scale, now called the 'Near-Death Experience Content Scale' (NDE-C). [135] This study reassessed the psychometric scale and divided it into five aspects" Beyond the usual, harmony, insight, border and gateway.(time perception, speeded thoughts, unusual sensations, ESP, OBE, ineffability, peacefulness and wellbeing, harmony and unity, voice, understanding, precognition, life review, encounter, leaving the Earthly world, void and fear, borer or point of no return, coming back, dying, bright light and gateway.) [136]

Kenneth Ring's Weighted Core Experience Index. (WCEI) contains ten elements and five stages of the journey during the experience, from leaving the body to entering an alternate realm of existence. (Components: subjective sense of being dead, feelings of peace, painlessness, bodily separation, dark region, haring a voice and encountering a presence, taking stock of one's life, enveloped in or seeing Light, seeing beautiful colors, entering the light, and encountering visible spirits.) [137] Michael B. Sabom M.D. noted that sixteen described transcendence and autoscopy as two aspects of the experience into another dimension.[138] He lists descriptions of some elements such as parks, clouds, sky, golden gates, flowers and a beautiful panorama. He lists reports of the presence of God and Jesus, seeing spirits, and angels. [139]

I was present for Ann Taves's presentation of her Inventory of Nonordinary Experiences (INOE) at AAR San Diego in 2019.[140] Her approach is more focused on how culture affects lived religious and extraordinary experiences rather than a straight etic phenomenological

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[135] Charlotte Martial, Jessica Simon, Ninon Puttaert, et al. "The Near-Death Experience Content (NDE-C) Scale: Development and Psychometric Validation." *Consciousness and Cognition* 86 (2020): 103049.

[136] Martial, The Near-Death Experience Content, 103049.

[137] Kenneth Ring, *Life at Death: A Scientific Investigation of the Near-Death Experience*. (Coward, McCann & Geoghegan, 1980), 32-36,44,191.

[138] Michael B. Sabom, *Recollections of Death: A Medical Investigation*. (Simon & Schuster, 1983).

[139] Sabom, *Recollections of Death*, 209-210.

[140] Ann Taves, Elliott Ihm, Melissa Wolf, et al. "The Inventory of Nonordinary Experiences (INOE): Evidence of Validity in the United States and India." *PloS one* 18, no. 7 (2023).

description-based list of elements. She prefers an emic list because it represents what that each particular culture accepts as an extraordinary experience. This I think applies to my own list of eighty elements, which although just a simple static list, marks an achievement in this dissertation for identifying specifically Mormon experiential elements of VTEs. Taves work is valuable, but it stays within an agnostic framework, focusing on social aspects, and does not engage possible supernatural or divine causes for the experiences.

Mormon VTEs contain many repeating and recurring features. When I compare my eighty elements with the generic NDE features there are shared and unshared elements. Shared elements are OBEs, a life review, the return to the body and visions of beauty, meeting relatives and religious figures. There are also elements that are not or hardly mentioned such as the tunnel or merging with the light. VTEs are also more solid and physical than some of the more ethereal generic NDEs. There are specifically Mormon elements. These include descriptions of a physical Veil, and specific Mormon social activities and church work activities, as well as the geographic description of the realms in alignment with Mormon cosmology. Elements such as premortality, seeing the span of cosmic history through Mormon eyes, meetings with Joseph Smith and the interactions with Jesus and Heavenly Father are all unique to VTEs. Later in this dissertation I will address the question of why elements are not always universal and often culturally or religiously specific.

This close, rich, and meticulous study of Mormon VTEs and deathbed visions identified eighty different elements of experience which can be compared with non-Mormon NDEs. Here are some observations about VTEs. There are less tunnel experiences, this tends to be a classic generic experience, of going through a dark tunnel and meeting a light at the end. Whereas in generic NDEs the experiencer is sent back, in VTEs, priesthood prayers and blessings can effect

a return from this side. There is the idea that the living can call the dead back to life. There is the continuity of priesthood roles, of missionary work, of progression to the goal of exaltation, of societal hierarchy, of genealogical work, of continued learning in classrooms and libraries, of busyness in preparation for Zion, even of potlucks! Some reports state that spirit families were often too busy to talk to visiting experiencers!

There is also specific preexistence themes absent in generic NDEs, such as women meeting with the spirits of future children. I will qualify this however with some New Ages ideas of how the 'other side' relates to Earth. In some New Age beliefs and experiences the idea that we exist before birth and choose to come to Earth, and then return to the heavenly realm is common. This is not a modern Christian idea but one influenced by Theosophy and other New Religious Movements. Like in generic NDEs, VTEs mention the feeling of returning home, the familiarity of the other side, of bliss and happiness, freedom from pain, losing fear of death, knowing life has a purpose that needs to be completed, the importance of human relationships, a life review, the observation of beautiful flowers and forests, cities, and the interactive even musical aspects to the geography. Also shared are descriptions of beauty and colors, and of love. Having an OBE, seeing one's body below, moving through walls and sold objects, and instant transportation to anywhere you think of, seeing and hearing conversations of the living and yet being invisible and inaudible are shared with generic NDEs. The return to the body, the pain of squeezing into it is also a shared report, as is the positive transformation of personality and life purpose afterwards, and sometimes the opening of psychic gifts.

Significant Elements

I am choosing to discuss what I consider to be the most significant elements to mention. Out of Body experience (OBE) - One is the phenomenon of autoscopy or being out of the body (OBE). In this classic example, a person has the sensation of 'rising up' high and looking down at their own body which they hardly recognize, and they remain calm and aware of the situation around this body and often witness conversations and events on Earth during this time, which are later verified and corroborated by others. Fifty-two VTE's that I listed reported an OBE. Lorenzo Dow Young's 1826 VTE reported an OBE, so did Jeff Olsen, who I met at the IANDS Conference in Salt Lake City in 2022. He walked around the hospital in spirit looking at everything that transpired there. My favorite account is by Thos. S. Thomas who's 1924 VTE had him following a telegram message down the lines to his family, announcing his imminent death. There is a definite allusion to some sort of dualism here, a Cartesian perspective of a spirit or soul separated from a body, housed in it only during life. According to the data the implications are that the body is not our real' home' for our spirit but the spirit world. That explains the multitude of reports describing the afterlife as a homecoming.

Light Twenty-four experiencers from the 19th to the 21st centuries encountered a light. Some just saw a light and followed it, but few reported a personality and voice emanating from the light. (Babble 1920 and Tooley 1972). The light seems to operate either as a covering or cloud of light out of which entities appear, or which shield entities from view. It is not identified as the Divine or God, as is the case in many generic NDEs. Only Betty Eadie encountered what she describes as a 'being of light', whereas Durham saw Jesus walking out of a similar light. Justas in generic NDEs, this light resonated with love, bliss and peace. Given that the Mormon

depiction of Heavenly Father and Jesus as beings with bodies, it makes sense that light might surround them, but that they are not disembodied ethereal lights of consciousness.

Guides Thirty-five experiencers described their guides. Some of the descriptions are very detailed. Some took them to meet Jesus, ancestors, or gave them tours of the Spirit World. Sometimes the guides are deceased relatives, or angels or old friends. Noone is left alone or in fear.[141] These ties in with the communal aspect of Mormon society both in Earth and on the other side. Meeting family, friends and other persons is the most discussed topics. Experiencers meet Jesus, Joseph Smith, ancestors and even those that they did not know had died, or persons that had died as infants that they had no prior knowledge of until after their return. While everyone has personal responsibility for their own progress, it is the communal ties and relationships that are most important. Hence the common theme of ancestors requesting Earthly Temple ordinance work be done for them, the stress on genealogical work and missionary work in Spirit Prison.

The Mormon Spirit World The Spirit World works in tandem and synchronicity to Earth, as if both are really interconnected. None reported meeting other than Mormons in the Spirit World, so they rest of humankind it is assumed, is elsewhere or in Spirit Prison. This is a significant observation because Mormons are only a tiny minuscule section of all humans who have ever lived, and the goal of incorporating and saving as many souls as possible is a formidable task indeed. This explains the teaching, learning and religious work still being carried out in the Spirit World. There is the desire to save as many ancestors as possible and given that progress and free will exist on the other side, it is possible. This world is just as physical as Earth, and yet more perfect. Bodies are perfect, nature is perfect, buildings are beautiful, and

[141] This contrasts with the Tibetan Bardo where fear and being alone are the two key themes. In the bardo the recited texts on Earth are the guides rather than entities on the other side.

there is a consensus that it is more 'real than real'. Colors have more vibrant hues than on Earth. Yet there are aspects which are more developed than on Earth, aspects which are akin to superpowers.

Telepathy, communication, and knowledge These are likened to superpowers in the sense that bodily limits no longer impede perfect telepathic communication. In the life review childhood events and actions can be seen from the emotional perspective from all parties involved. Just as vision is 360 degrees and hearing perfect, so complete knowledge comes instantly to answer all questions. Experiencers retuned with a full understanding of the Plan of Salvation. To think of a place is to be there and to think of a person is to see them. Four VTEs mentioned the theme of vibration and frequency as well as an altered space and time. Although this is a tiny fraction of reports it has significance in a scientific understanding of how this realm might operate. A common report is that experiencers felt they were a long time, like days, in the Spirit World only to discover afterwards that they had been 'dead' only minutes.

Returning Just as pain ceased upon leaving the body, pain was felt during re-entry and often reluctance to squeeze into the tiny flesh body. The main reason to return was to carry on the Earthly mission which had been agreed upon before birth. Both VTEs and NDEs resonate with the common phrases "It is not your time" or "Your work is not done" or words to that effect. It is obvious that from the Spirit World perspective our mission on Earth is crucial and very important. Peculiar to VTEs is the report that priestly blessings aided the spirit to return to the body, and at times, conveyed healing.

Authority

Throughout this dissertation I have referenced the importance of authority. One's 'authority' or standing within the Church, or one's location as elite or lay can impact

interpretation and acceptance of one's experience by others. It is obvious that some aspects of VTEs might go against the grain and lead to tension between the lay person and official church doctrine. Some of my NDE type VTEs do challenge authority and accepted doctrines. Spencer's descriptions in Visions of Glory for example still is controversial.[142] Despite recent calls for Church members to keep such visions private and sacred, others take to social media. This might be justified in some cases, such as Ralph V. Jensen's reluctant testimony that life continues aimed at helping those suffering from bereavement during the covid pandemic.[143] As previously mentioned also, Mormonism is such a wide umbrella term that can encompass elite official books on NDEs, such as Top's, or lay written accounts by unknown experiencers such as Wren, Wayman and Rampton.

There is no one type of "Mormon" experience, although the label "Mormon" is convenience. Mormons are individuals and there are differences between individuals such as their degree of traditionalism, conservatism or liberal thinking. There are Mormons in Utah, Mormons of different ethnicities, races and classes, and Mormons who navigate the world through languages other than English. All these factors can influence religious experiences and their interpretation. My data shows similarities between the Mormon VTEs but there are some personal differences also. Brent Top and other Mormon scholars talk about NDEs in a way that does not upset the church leaders whereas some of the individuals that publish books on their experiences often cross the line between orthodoxy and heresy.[144]

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[142] John M. Pontius, *Visions of Glory : One Man's Astonishing Account of the Last Days* (CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc., 2012).

[143] See Ralph V. Jensen's website: https://taughtbychrist.com/.

[144] Spring Creek Publishers, whose website is now down since its manager, Chad Daybell is imprisoned, is notorious for its book genres, which pushed a more extremist and 'prepper' agenda.

People who are ‘Mormon’ can have experiences that contain ideas that are peculiar to them, or part of folk ideas, popular culture or even New Age ideas that contradict or challenge official Mormonism. Variants of Mormon thought is absolutely reflected in the books and NDE/VTE accounts discussed in this dissertation, and this is an indication of a vibrant and healthy religious system which evolves, accommodates or rejects new spiritual inputs.

Erin Stile’s cleverly contrasted how folk and orthodox Mormonism interacted, even within the small sub-culture of LDs members in Northern Utah which account for perhaps the older of Momon communities but not representative of the worldwide organization that Mormonism has become. While it might be expected that converts across the world accept the official doctrines brought by missionaries, and rely on uniform texts, as well as their own indigenous cultural contexts, Stile’s group holds a special place. Many in this population are descendants of the earliest pioneers and have journals and documents, including VTEs both in written and oral form in their families. Again, Mormons are not a monolithic group and although there is one LDS institution, personal and folk variations in interpretation and practice occur. Splinter groups and cults have always existed throughout the history of the movement. The FLDS, for example, have their own way of life, dress and marriage customs. This acceptance of difference within the movement explains and account for why both Brent Top and the Chad Daybell might be seen as two ends of a spectrum in Mormon expression, with Top representing the more orthodox voice of the Church and Daybell representing the rogue element going off the edge into apostasy and criminality. My VTE data contains voices from different parts of this spectrum, some are more orthodox, and some are more folkish or even heretical. This could be described as the lay versus elite divide. One’s location can also color one’s interpretation of spiritual experiences.

Stiles's separation of Mormonism in Utah into three groups that interact was useful in understanding the different forces that impact VTE interpretations and narratives and it is a way to view the different voices of Mormons under the 'Sacred Canopy'. She identifies the institutional body of the church, the Mormon Culture, and the 'true religion' or actual teachings of the church and the original practice of the religion in its essence and meaning.[145] She warns against the mistake of over-simplifying definitions and uncritically including religious experiences under a bounded Mormon framework.[146] My VTEs occur in a cultural setting, and they are either accepted or rejected by the standards of orthodoxy of the Church, but if those such as Daybell, Row or Eadie emphasize the 'true essence of religion' and use their experience to justify and verify their interpretation, it can lead to a clash with the institutional authority. Daybell came to have his own idea of true religion by his definition, which is different from the definitions of others and the institution. He put his own perspective above the LDS church and above the law and a bizarre and evil sect evolved. Yet even his blasphemy was Mormon in character, in the footsteps of all those who had fallen away from the mainstream and formed sects in the past. Daybell would be included in the group that Stiles says, "criticize the institutional church or aspects of Mormon culture and 'uphold the true religion."[147] While society has found Daybell and his wife guilty of murder and excommunicated him, and despite the obvious evil of his ideology that in his own mind justified his actions, he still falls under the Mormon umbrella. He is not the first to break away claiming his own prophetic authority, deluded by his belief in special revelation, and infected by extreme apocalyptic ideas that stem

[145] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 11.
[146] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 191.
[147] Stiles, *The Devil Sat,* 11.

from a rich American religious tradition of awaiting the end times. (Chad Daybell's threat to authority is discussed in more detail in the appendices).[148]

Perhaps Stiles ideas of devils and devil narratives suggests Daybell et al. got their imagery from folk currents in the culture. [149] They do indeed stray from the idea that spirits are usually benevolent, comforting and helpful, as identified by Stiles.[150] Stiles points out the belief that evil is regarded as a cosmological force (121) aimed at compromising morality and upsetting the order of the community. [151] Satan fights with our agency by temping people to stray from righteousness.[152] She notes that actual possession is rare in LDS narratives.[153] Daybell's delusion seems rather to mirror ideas of spiritual warfare and possession found in Roman Catholic and Evangelical theology. If there is a devil at work, it certainly played out to its most criminal extreme in this case. Daybell entertained the idea that people could be possessed. In 21st century NDEs Denise Mendenhall and Lance Richardson write about this phenomenon and yet it is not mentioned in earlier or 19th century Spirit World visions. Stephen Taysom acknowledges that belief in the devil was part of Joseph Smith's theology which is not surprising since he was part of the American religious landscape of his time.[154] While the possibility possession is not denied, and there are exorcism type rituals, that were used mostly in earlier times, to deal with

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[148] See discussion of Chad Daybell in Appendix 3 # 75, pp. 484,488,497,556,560,561,556,565, 633, 805.
I hesitated to add such a notorious person in my data but later decided that Daybell grew up in Mormonism and his choices and delusion of prophethood is a cautionary tale of apostasy, excommunication, sin and prison.

[149] Daybell took personal patriarchal and priesthood authority taken to the extreme.

[150] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 2. Stiles studies lived spiritual experiences of the living whereas I study lived experience of the afterlife and approach the topic from the other side of the veil. Rather than spirits coming here I describe humans going there.

[151] Stiles, *The Devil Sat,* 121-122.

[152] Stiles, *The Devil Sat,* 147.

[153] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 149.

[154] Stephen Taysom, "'Satan Mourns Naked upon the Earth' Locating Mormon Possession and Exorcism Rituals in the American Religious Landscape, 1830-1977." *Religion and American Culture: A Journal of Interpretation* 27, no. 1 (2017): 57–94.

this issue, this phenomenon is rarely discussed by officialdom.[155] The focus falls mostly on the general cosmic warfare amongst the laity which links, I think, to wider American ideas of spiritual warfare.[156]

Certainly, more orthodox Mormons such as Top, as well as non-Mormons would condemn Daybell's criminal actions. The history of Mormon theology and the chaos of conflicting interpretations that has plagued and threatened the mainstream orthodoxy, in this case, shows how Mormonism contains under its umbrella, a wide range of variation, like branches of a tree emerging from the institutional truck. Yet this is the inevitable outcome of personal agency and Mormons are only human, able to make choices both good and bad. The safest path therefore is to stay closer to the mainstream and when lay folk beliefs conflict with elite versions, perhaps the latter have more authority and balance. This means that while VTEs display more folk elements in many cases, these visions should not be used to set up a challenge to authority or contradict accepted teachings of the afterlife. Nor are they proof of an afterlife. They are only personal experiences of a sacred nature which may or not be correct. Stiles also cautions that some spiritual experiences might be invented or embellished to increase status or to gain attention.[157]

I would say that both Top's elite approach and Daybell's personal approach both fall under the umbrella of Mormonism but there is room for differences. There is a robust history of Mormon sects breaking away after doctrinal disagreements. This is what Daybell and those like him are doing. The unorthodox who will not concede ultimately fall away. Chad Daybell is not a unique example of leaders led astray by their own ego. He is told that he is special and that he

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[155] Taysom, Satan Mourns, 85.
[156] Taysom, *Satan Mourns,* 85.
[157] Stiles, *The Devil Sat*, 189.

has a mission, and that he's being sent back to earth with a certain degree of divine authority. This is a quality of the quintessential religious sect leader both within Mormonism and in other religions too. Another example might be the imprisoned FLDS leader Warren Jeffs. The Mormon pot can hold both Top, Daybell, Jeffs and others of various persuasions. Even those excommunicated from the LDS and rejected for heresy, will claim that they are "Mormon", just as the FLDS and other sects claim. There are variants of Mormon thought and hence VTEs. Mormon theology is not a single whole, and while there are beliefs held in common there are differences within Mormonism based on time and place. For example, the number of NDE like VTEs has mushroomed since the 1970s when the phenomenon entered the discourse of popular culture. Sectarianism within the Church has existed since the beginning. Today as in the past, some individuals create their own cults that are not orthodox. Daybell is an example in this breakaway cultic category. It might be suggested that these experiences mirror the evolution of LDS theology and the culture and society of people who grow up in them. Chad used charismatic power to challenge conventional theology and even the law, since his heavenly version of right and wrong too precedence.

While the data shows many similarities, there are differences in people's veil crossing experiences which are affected by and cultural aspects individual perspectives and factors such as one's outlook, personality and worldview, within the Mormon community. It is convenience to use the term Mormon but under this many Mormon sub-cultures exist. An individuals mindset, which plays into the VTE, is influenced by many complex factors in situatedness, upbringing, religion, era, political views and other personal preferences. The case of Betty Eadie is an example of how complicated interpretating and balancing NDEs within a tradition and its tension with elite authority can be.

There is always an evolution of Mormon theology, and it is expected that as doctrines evolve assert an influence on near-death experiences. Conversely when NDEs are interpreted by are expressed through a cultural lens, and since Mormons are part of a wider society, other ideas compete in the effort of interpret them. There are not always firm boundaries, but more of an ebb and flow between afterlife VTEs and generic NDEs and diffusion of themes. There are different types of Mormonism, and this has always been the case, but with social media it seems amplified today. The VTEs do reveal these shifts and nuances. When many generic and even Mormon NDEs are shared on social media and in paperback books written in recent years it is obvious that New Age ideas are used in their interpretation. These ideas challenge some other interpretations of these experiences from established Christian and Mormon Churches. Both Mormons and New Agers share the idea of being a spirit being before birth. In modern Western societies ideas can spread and influence even those from different faith traditions. It is possible that some Evangelical beliefs and New Age beliefs filter into the Mormon community on the popular level and this might explain non-Mormon doctrines appearing in some VTEs. e.g. Betty Eadie.

Boyd K. Packer denounced Betty Eadie's books, and she has been highly criticized by the Church.[158] On her part she does not advertise her LDS affiliations and ties and plays them down or avoids identifying her faith in interviews. New Age ideas have crept into her books and the result is a mélange.[159] An example of how some very modern VTEs show influences of New

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[158] Introvigne, *Embraced*, 113. There were reports that Packer called her book "bunk" in a meeting in 1993. Chris Heimerdinger reported that a friend attended a Stake Conference in Las Vegas wherein Elder Boyd K. Packer specifically informed the congregation that Sister Eadie, "could not have been where she said that she had been." See, Chris Heimerdinger, *"*Revelatory Stewardship and the Book of Mormon*" Book of Mormon Geography* (blog), (accessed Sept 3, 2023), https://bookofmormongeography.org/basics/models-reviewed/book-mormon-archaeological-forum/revelatory-stewardship-book-mormon-chris-heimerdinger/.

[159] Betty J. Eadie, and Curtis Taylor. *Embraced by the Light* (Gold Leaf Press, 1992). -- Betty J. Eadie, *The Awakening Heart : My Continuing Journey to Love* (Pocket Books, 1996).

Age beliefs such is the idea that before birth one chooses one's life partners, career , major life events, even diseases and setbacks. However, these ideas go against the important Mormon emphasis on agency and free will that is crucial as a part of the Plan of Salvation. Massimo Introvigne discusses these important juxtapositions and the confusion between New age ideas, Betty Eadie and Mormonism.[160] He notes that Mormon doctrine supports NDEs as a peek into the Spirit World, and that many Church leaders have had experiences of this realm.[161] The point is that Eadie was a convert and often inactive, so she is indicative of Mormons who might have imported prior Protestant or Roman Catholic beliefs, into their newly embraced faith. This might occur at an unconscious level, but Eadie was raised a Catholic and even upon conversion, deeply held beliefs can reappear in visions. Eadie was not bathed in nor raised in Mormon folk culture in the way Stiles has described, and this means her religious expression is bound to differ. There might be a difference in the way converts and cradle Mormons view Mormonism, their religious perspectives, and the cultural situatedness of both types. An expected difference in VTEs might be expected. It could be argued that Eadie had little knowledge of the church she was baptized into and less experience of the culture and less immersion in it. One example of ideas which go against church doctrines are her suggestions that God has absolute power over evil, and that that humans do not have full agency, and that spirits interfere in the choices of parents to be.[162] Peggy Fletcher Stack called her a New Age apostate in the Salt Lake Tribune, 17 June 1995.[163] However she did not initiate her own sect, only a website![164] The elite in the Church criticized

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[160] Massimo Introvigne, "Embraced by the Church? Betty Eadie, Near-Death Experiences, and Mormonism." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 29, no. 3 (1996): 99-119.

[161] Introvigne, *Embraced*, 103.

[162] Introvigne, *Embraced*, 105,112.

[163] Peggy Fletcher Stack, "Is Mormon Author Embraced or Embarrassed by the Light? *"Salt Lake Tribune,* 17 June 1995).

[164] Betty J Eadie, "Embraced by the Light, " https://www.embracedbythelight.com/.

Eadie's book.[165] Orson Scott Card argued that her books departs from Mormon traditions.[166] He notes the varying reactions to her book in the Mormon community, from admiration to rejection. This variation in reaction can be seen with other controversial VTE books also.[167] This spectrum of reactions reflects the variation between personal views of Mormon members, but her book still clashes with the main doctrines of the Church. Card suggests the litmus test is the Test of Revelation, which she fails. He also warns against using personal visions for profit or fame.[168] He concludes by saying that "Latter-day Saints are not free to accept both the teachings of LDS prophets and those of Betty J. Eadie." I agree that the authority of the Church must prevail for Mormons, as well as the Doctrine of Revelatory Stewardship, and so when readers who are Mormon encounter NDEs or VTEs this warning be kept in mind.[169]

While most VTErs are sincere there is always the possibility of invention for the sake of manipulation. The Church has not hesitated to sanction and even excommunicate those who insist on mixing Mormon and heretical views together and who use the 'authority' of their

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[165] Introvigne, *Embraced*, 113.

[166] Introvigne, *Embraced*, 112. Card, Orson Scott. *Vigor.* August 1994. http://www.nauvoo.com/vigor/issues/06.html

[167] Meridian Magazine, "Julie Rowe | Meridian Magazine Meridian Magazine," n.d., https://latterdaysaintmag.com/tag/julie-rowe/. (accessed May 3, 2023).

[168] Card. *Vigor*. There is a Doctrine of Revelatory Stewardship that safeguards authority. Jeremy, "Two Guiding Principles of Personal Revelation That Every Latter-day Saint Needs to Know. - My Life by Gogo Goff," My Life by Gogo Goff, October 3, 2021, https://mylifebygogogoff.com/2019/03/two-guiding-principles-of-personal-revelation-that-every-latter-day-saint-needs-to-know.html. Book of Mormon Geography Lands - Western New York Model, "Revelatory Stewardship and the Book of Mormon by Chris Heimerdinger | Book of Mormon Geography Lands - Western New York Model," October 1, 2023, https://bookofmormongeography.org/basics/models-reviewed/book-mormon-archaeological-forum/revelatory-stewardship-book-mormon-chris-heimerdinger./.

[169] Most Mormons I have interviewed suggest Top, Lundahl and Crowther as their more trusted sources for this genre.

individual religious experience to bypass the authority of the Church, e.g. Julie Rowe. [170]The voice of one person cannot contradict the consensus of the community and this includes claims stemming from religious experiences. There is a tension between VTEs and prompting of the 'spirit' giving a personal revelation and knowledge and the revelatory pronouncements of the leadership of the Church. Revelation comes across the veil from the divine realm to the human world by various means. Elder David Bednar of the Quorum of the Twelves says, "Revelations are conveyed in a variety of ways, including, for example, dreams, visions, conversations with heavenly messengers, and inspiration. Some revelations are received immediately and intensely; some are recognized gradually and subtly. The two experiences with light I described help us to better understand these two basic patterns of revelation."[171] To maintain order and orthodoxy when a spiritual experience imparts information contrary to the voice of the orthodox church, the latter takes precedence. All revelation is prone to fallibility.

Thoughts About VTEs

There are so many small details in the data, but most themes and elements are repeated. I have listening to or read literally tens of thousands of NDEs and VTEs over the past few years

[170] Julie Rowe excommunicated in 2019. Julie Rowe, "#77 - Unrighteous Dominion," May 26, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iEPl8t1XnKw. She predicted a foreign invasion, plagues, and a major economic collapse. Rowe initially defended Daybell's character and said she was convinced of his innocence. In 2015, she caused fears in some Mormon circles with her prediction that the world would end with the September lunar eclipse. *The LDS* Church Education System placed Rowe's book *A Greater Tomorrow* (2014) on a list of "spurious materials." Her book is not endorsed by the church. Meridian, Why do Some, Julie Rowe, https://latterdaysaintmag.com/tag/julie-rowe/.

[171] Elder David A. Bednar, , "The Spirit of Revelation," April 2, 2011, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2011/04/the-spirit-of-revelation?lang=eng.

and I not only can predict what a brand-new testimony might saw next, but I can also identify Mormon from non-Mormon testimonies, even if the experiencer does not reveal their religious affiliation. Only this summer This was the case when I listening to two new cases, e.g. Vincent "Vinney" Todd Tolman and Valerie Rose Sterrett from Ogden Utah.[172] Viney, who kept his VTE private for years but is now found on social media giving interviews and providing his own website. He does not openly identify as LDS, but in interviews with Mormons hints at his own mission and Mormon rites of passage.[173] He has published his own book.[174] At age twenty-five he passed out in a Dairy Queen bathroom after an accidental ingestion of too much prework powder in his gym drink. After being declared dead and sent to the morgue in a body bag. A rookie EMT tried one last time to revive him even though a half hour had passed, and his heart was restarted. Vinney even remembers the thoughts of the EMT man and told him all about these later, giving the poor man a fright. Valerie Rose Sterrett who suffered a heart attack in 1997, experienced the Spirit World and saw Spirit Prison also. [175] Her experience enriched her faith and encouraged her to express her feelings as a musician. Like Vinney she did not openly say she was Mormon, but some researched confirmed my intuition that they were from this background. Like many NDErs who return with psychic abilities, she continues receiving spiritual message from across the Veil in dreams and impressions. She also learned only after her experience that

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[172] For Valerie Rose Sterrett's interview see: JeffMara Podcast, "Near Death Experiencer Discovers A Spirit Prison & Paradise," June 19, 2024, https://youtu.be/V9HPRqjsgQ0?si=ciCdxnmrJSRCW4Ho.

[173] I recommended the website: LDS Podcast. "Latter-Day Lights." Inspired Stories, 2023. LDS Podcast "Latter-Day Lights" - Inspired Stories, "Found Dead, Put in a Body Bag, and Taught 10 Heavenly Lessons: Vinney Tolman - Latter-Day Lights," June 4, 2023,https://youtu.be/ML2wSU6EgVo?si=CZGkay282i2sQMrk. Podcast, Video, "How He Wrote Vinney Tolman's Story 'The Light After Death': Lynn Taylor's Story - LDS Podcast 'Latter-Day Lights' - Inspiring Stories for Latter-Day Saints." LDS Podcast "Latter-Day Lights" - Inspiring Stories for Latter-Day Saints - the LDS Podcast Where Members Can Share Their Stories, June 12, 2023, https://www.latterdaylights.com/podcast/how-he-wrote-vinney-tolmans-story-the-light-before-death-lynn-taylors-story/. Tolman's webpage is https://livinggodslight.com/

[174] Tolman, *Light after Death.*

[175] JeffMara Podcast, "Near Death Experiencer Discovers a Spirit Prison & Paradise," June 19, 2024, https://youtu.be/V9HPRqjsgQ0?si=H3Xv_BhuvhCslEaw.

her guide was her great-grandmother who had named her and appeared in an announcing dream to her mother when she was in utero. The fact that Mormon's recounting VTEs have subtle differences from generic NDEs show how finely attuned I have become in identifying the cultural origin of the experiencer. With these as with all experiencers, their faith informs their theology just as their theology helps explain their experience. This symbiosis is also noticed and described in the work of Gregory Shushan who argues that the origin of afterlife beliefs emerges from personal experience, which in turn gives rise to theologies of the afterlife.[176]

Some VTEs are shared and not individual experiences. One example is the shared death experiences of a group of firemen. The significance of shared experiences is that the possibility of hallucination, an accusation often thrown at single experiencers, is lessened or eliminated. Arvin Gibson documented the experiences of a crew of hotshots caught up in a hillside conflagration in 1989.[177] According to the report all of them shared an NDE and saw their lifeless bodies from above and met each other in this alternate realm. All survived and suffered no ill effects even through everything was charred around them and their metal tools had melted, and their recollections all tallied up with each other's.[178] One man's deformed foot looked healed in the other realm, a bright light was encountered, as well as deceased relatives and pets who used telepathic communication.

The teachings of modern church leaders are a guide to help us interpret VTEs in their own context. The *Gateway we call Death* by Russell M. Nelson is a small book that many

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[176] Shushan, *Afterlife in early Civilizations*, 21-40.

[177]Nancy Browne "Near-Death Experiences Testify of Afterlife," Third Hour (Blog), January 2015, https://thirdhour.org/blog/faith/near-death-experiences-testify-of-afterlife/.

[178] Kevin Williams, "A Group of Firefighters Near-Death Experience," Near-Death Experiences and the Afterlife, November 1, 2024, https://near-death.com/firefighters-nde/. See: Gibson, *Fingerprints of God*, 129-131 and Gibson, *They Saw Beyond Death*, 128-133.

Mormons have read to understand the official modern attitude toward death. Russell Nelson insists "we need to understand the purpose of life in order to understand the significance of death."[179] In the first chapter he paints a picture of our lives from the time of being spirit children eager to be born on Earth, with bodies created in the image of our divine parents. It is the resurrection of Jesus that allows for our own resurrection when the body, which separated at death, will be reunited with the spirit.[180] He reiterates the teaching that the spirit world is near the Earth and that it is a place where "each spirit continues to live and is busily engaged." [181] Nelson presided over the Church and preaching of the Gospel on Earth, and he sees this mission continuing in the afterlife, to those who were not Mormon and he repeats the message of regarding the vision given to President Joseph F. Smith in 1918, of the preaching of the gospel to those in need of redemption in Spirit Prison.[182] He refers to Smith's vision of the reunification of the Earthly body with the spirit after the redemption of the dead,[183] and proceeds to describe the three degrees of glory, the telestial, terrestrial and celestial.[184] Other topics discussed are how to prepare for eternal life (90), Temple ordinances (91) and sociality in the spirit world.[185] He explains that death is required to fulfil our destiny: "Passage through the gateway of death is required in order to permit their glorious blessings to be realized," [186] which he describes by referring to D&C 132:19 – 20,

> again, verily I say unto you, if a man marry a wife by my word, which is my law, and by the new and everlasting covenant, and it is sealed unto them by the Holy Spirit of promise, by him who is anointed, unto whom I have appointed this power and the keys of this priesthood; and it shall be said unto them—Ye shall come forth in the

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[179] Nelson, Russell M. *The Gateway We Call Death* (Deseret, 1995), 1.
[180] Nelson, *Gateway We Call Death*, 2. Also see D&C 93:33-34.
[181] Nelson, *Gateway We Call Death*, 81.
[182] D&C 138:57-9 President Joseph F. Smith in Salt Lake City, Utah, on October 3, 1918.
[183] D&C 138:17.
[184] D&C 76:64-81; Nelson, *Gateway We Call Death*, 1995. 89.
[185] D&C 130:2. -- Nelson, *Gateway We Call Death*, 92.
[186] Nelson, *Gateway We Call Death*, 92.

> first resurrection; and if it be after the first resurrection, in the next resurrection; and shall inherit thrones, kingdoms, principalities, and powers, dominions, all heights and depths… Then shall they be gods, because they have no end; therefore shall they be from everlasting to everlasting, because they continue; then shall they be above all, because all things are subject unto them. Then shall they be gods, because they have all power, and the angels are subject unto them. (D&C 132:19 – 20.)

Brown describes how in November 1974 Elder Hugh B. Brown's VTE, when Brown attended a Temple dedication. Brown, he told Nelson that he had been visited during the night by the late President Harold B. Lee (who had died the year before). Brown, he says, "described it as a glorious visit." Later Brown told Harold B. Lee's sister "I had a glorious visit with Harold last night. He is just fine. It was so good to visit with him." [187] Next Nelson describes a healing intervention concerning Elder David B. Haight.

Elder David B. Haight spoke at a general conference of the Church following his miraculous recovery from a life-threatening illness. "The terrible pain and commotion of people ceased. I was now in a calm and peaceful setting; all was serene and quiet. 102 I was conscious of two persons in the distance on a hillside, one standing on a higher level than the other. The person on the higher level was pointing to something I could not see. I heard no voices but was conscious of being in a holy presence and atmosphere. During the hours and days that followed, there was impressed again and again upon my mind the eternal mission and exalted position of the Son of Man.[188]

Nelson concludes with his own testimony:

> I also testify that the Veil of death is thin. I Know by experiences too scared to print that those who have gone before us are not strangers to leaders of the Church. To us and to

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[187] Nelson, *Gateway We Call Death*, 100; also, Russell M. Nelson, From Heart to Heart (Quality Press 1979), 188.

[188] Nelson, *Gateway We Call Death* 101; also, David B. Haight, "The Sacrament – and the Sacrifice," *Ensign*, 1989, 59-60.

you, our loved ones many be just as close as the room nearby, separated only by the gateway to immortality and eternal life."[189]

Before I end this chapter, I want to add a word about a modern Veil thinning experience shared by a church leader, President Gordon B. Hinckley. During the dedication of the Mexico City Mexico Temple Dec. 2-3, 1983, when he was then second counselor in the First Presidency, his voice quivered as he began his address. He testified that souls "from the other side of the Veil" were present. "All rooms (of the Temple) are filled with faithful Latter-day Saints," he said, "but I am convinced there is a larger, unseen congregation participating with us." He then added, exclaimed, "Welcome, Father Lehi! Oh, how your heart must rejoice!"[190] This echoes the Temple visitations of the early 19th century. This VTEs are not just deathbed or trauma related incidents but often Temple incidents. Perhaps it is the quiet contemplative peaceful state of mind in a Temple setting, away from the busy life outside, that allows inter-realm communication to occur.

In the appendix I have listed more theology to accompany the elements. It covers topics such as the body and soul relationship, spirit bodies, angels, the hierarchy of being and eternal progression to exaltation and apotheosis. Other topics include travel in the Spirit World, the Purpose of Mortality, and the End Times. My repetition of the data might seem a little mundane, and it is because text cannot capture the emotion and aliveness of each mystical experience. Hearing so many testimonies has moved me to tears, excited my curiosity and reinforced my

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[189] Nelson, *Gateway We Call Death* 110.

[190] Gerry Avant, "The Most Memorable Part of the Mexico City Temple Dedication Was These Words From President Hinckley," *Church News*, January 11, 2024, https://www.thechurchnews.com/2018/6/22/23221456/the-most-memorable-part-of-the-mexico-city-temple-dedication-were-these-words-from-president-hinckle/#:~:text=President%20Hinckley%20had%20been%20speaking,how%20your%20heart%20must%20rejoice!%E2%80%9D.

own personal faith. This writing this dissertation has been a faith journey as well as an education in this topic. These reports touch on life, death, relationship to loved ones and to the Divine. This is everything that is of paramount important to us and it is had to write and invest time in this topic without being deeply moved to one's core.

Mormon religious experiences are understood in the community to be real and concrete. Having collected, sorted and ordered VTEs into elements, and given their theological and cultural context, the question remains: is there a deeper explanation beyond the doctrinal explanation? How can these experiences be explained as part of the universal human interaction with reality? Comparing Mormon religious experiences with those from other religions, such as Tibetan Buddhism, and generic NDEs might help answer these existential questions concerning life, death and the nature of reality. Mormon teachings might satisfy these questions for a Mormon, just as Tibetan philosophy might answer these questions for Tibetans, but as an academic I need to stand back and look at these experiences from another perspective. e.g., Why to most NDE reports such as Mormon and Tibetan contain references to guides, a light, telepathy and increased senses and knowledge? Why do experiencers return with a passion to help others and uphold the moral good, and commit to spread love and compassion?

Having read and listening to all these accounts and understood how they fit into the Mormon context, it is now time to take them outside of this emic setting and to zoom out to the etic and universal aspects of the NDE and other anomalous religious experiences and to explore possible explanations. Mormons have their own explanations of course, and as we have seen Mormon writers have written on this topic, but to appreciate them fully we need to look at the bigger picture which means bringing the comparative religion and philosophical lens to the topic.

PART TWO: NDES IN COMPARATIVE THEOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVES

Chapter Three

Comparativist Approaches: Possible Interpretations of Mormon VTEs and NDEs

> There is great reason to hope that death is a good; for one of two things—either death is a state of nothingness and utter unconsciousness, or, as men say, there is a change and migration of the soul from this world to another. . . . In another world . . . besides being happier than we are, they will be immortal.
>
> —— Plato

The Comparative Approach

This is the second part of my three-part dissertation in which I will focus on the general topic of Near-Death Studies, which is the sub-discipline which investigates NDEs. In part one we began by looking at Mormon VTEs and the Mormon academic study of this area. It is important to understand the cultural context of VTEs from both an emic Mormon and from a wider etic non-Mormon perspective in order to investigate how VTEs relate to generic and universal NDEs, and similar anomalous experiences. Thus, we now move to take a broader perspective whilst asking the question, how can we explain these mysterious phenomena? If there is an explanation for NDEs, then it might help explain VTE's and vice versa. In addition, perhaps both NDEs and VTEs are only two aspects of a larger phenomenon involving all anomalous human experiences which, I propose involve human conscious awareness as a common denominator.

My studies build on the work of scholars who came before me, and so I will discuss their contributions and then suggest how we can go further to construct a general explanation for

NDEs. We can divide the different approaches to explaining NDEs into two main groups. Each approach mirrors and sprouts from Western or Eastern approaches to religious experiences. These two divisions have a fluid boundary, given the interfaith dialogues and spread of world religious around the globe in the last two centuries. There has been cross cultivation in this diffusion of ideas, as well as interactions with scientific approaches.

I would argue that any explanation would best come from interdisciplinary and interfaith dialogue, and that even the goal of reaching a singular explanation might be impossible, but nevertheless an important exercise. Each scholar contributes a unique voice, and all voices help bring clarity. I am applying the method of the rich tradition of comparative studies, comparing not just religions but also the scholarship on religious topics.

In part One we discussed Mormon explanations of VTEs within their tradition. In this chapter I will present the background history of Near-Death Studies and then present areas that offer explanations. I have identified four principal areas of explanations of NDEs. (i) Natural Explanations (physiological, psychological, social sciences.) (ii) Supranatural Explanations (medicine, physics, neuroscience, cognitive science) (iii) Supernatural and Western religious explanations a) non-theistic b) theistic (iv) Metaphysical and Philosophical explanations. (v) Eastern approaches: Hindu and Neo-Vedanta. Buddhism technically belongs in this category, but I will devote the next chapter to Tibetan approaches. The first three main approaches represent three distinct positions on what constitutes reality in the West. (i) *Natural* refers to naturalism i.e. atheistic scientific reductionism, where the sciences define reality and exclude divine or religious perspectives.

This approach is the default mode of operation in modern Western civilization. It rests on the assumption that matter is the building block of reality. (ii) The *supranatural*[1] means any approach to reality that goes beyond science, but that does not contradict a possible scientific explanation in the future if science progresses. These include controversial or challenging explanations, but which are possible in theory. (iii) *Supernatural* explanations are typically religious in nature and involve the action of divine or spiritual entities e.g., miracles, ghosts, or divine intervention. Accordingly, those in group (i) would argue that VTEs and NDEs are hallucinations, group (ii) might argue that a logical explanation might be found in the future, perhaps by understanding the operation of consciousness, whereas group (iii), which includes Mormons, would see a divine plan and a heavenly afterlife as the answer. All three approach *psi* topics such as OBEs, NDEs and VTEs differently and offer diverse alternative explanations.[2] There are scholars who have specialized in these topics and their input must be appreciated if one is to understand and explain NDEs and there is a history and development to their theories.

The History of the Field of Near-Death Studies

Near-Death Studies is a loosely organized, interdisciplinary, contentious, and relatively modern field of studies heralding back to Dr. Raymond A. Moody's work, and his famous book *Life After Life* 1975, provided a focal point that brought the NDE phenomenon into mainstream cultural awareness.[3] Moody might have created the labels to describe NDEs, but he did not

[1] A term coined and widely used by Rupert Spira. This offers a different perspective from those who focus on the Hard Problem of Consciousness.

[2] *Psi* refers to strange events and abilities in parapsychology. It is derived from the Greek letter ψ which is the first letter for psyche.

[3] Raymond A. Moody and Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *Life After Life; and, Reflections on Life After Life: The Investigation of a Phenomenon ... Survival of Bodily Death* (Guideposts, 1975).

invent the phenomenon, which seems to be a natural and universal human phenomenon. This field draws disparate strands from other disciplines together, including Thanatology, Theology, Psychology and the study of religious experiences. The field is represented not just by individual scholars but also by organizations and universities.

The Institutions

It is too complex for one scholarly mind to tackle the topic so the benefit of large centers is that academic minds can push the boundaries of knowledge together. Also, finance is available for large research projects. Some groups are date back over a century, but many come out of the later 20th century. One of the oldest harkens back to 19th century England, called The Society for Psychical Research (SPR)[4] which was founded in 1882 by Frederic W.H. Myers, author of Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death, 1903.[5] Spiritualism was in vogue, and seances were a popular social pastime, and communication with the deceased was promoted. The SPR still functions and has a current focus on survival research. Other UK university centers include The Religious Experience Research Centre at the University of Wales, formerly at Oxford under Alister Hardy. This institution is linked to the work of Gregory Shushan, an eminent NDE scholar and Bettina E. Schmidt an expert in religious experience and trance.[6] From a medical perspective, there is the University of Southampton which conducted the AWARE (AWAreness during Resuscitation) study and its Human Consciousness Project.2008 overseen by

[4] "Our History | spr.ac.uk," n.d., https://www.spr.ac.uk/about/our-history (accessed June 4, 2022).

[5] F. W. H. Myers, and L. H Myers. *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death* (Longmans, Green, 1903).

[6] "The Alister Hardy Trust: Religious & Spiritual Experiences.," Alister Hardy Trust, n.d., https://www.studyspiritualexperiences.org/ (accessed June 4, 2022).

Dr. Sam Parnia. [7] It conducted a second study in 2023.[8] This focuses on the biology of NDE and OBE experiences during cardiac arrest.[9] Parnia has just released his latest study in August 2024 called *Lucid Dying* in which he claims to explain consciousness and dying from a scientific perspective.[10] He seems to have borrow the term *lucid* from the Buddhist Dream Yoga terminology, meaning that in a dream or even in a dying state the person can retain awareness of the process of changing states of consciousness. Parnia says that this book presents data that proves that the Self is not annihilated after death, but indeed it actually expands. The publisher's description claims "there really is a *universal* experience of death that is meaningful, transcendent, positive, and transformative—not hallucinatory, delusional, or illusory as previously imagined. "These are bold claims, which if accepted, validate the testimonies of NDErs.

In the United States one of the most well-known and respected bodies, which also is known to have academic ties to the Dalai Lama XIV is the UVA Division of Perceptual Studies – "The DOPS core research mission is the rigorous evaluation of empirical evidence for exceptional human experiences and capacities that bear on whether mind and brain are distinct and separable and whether consciousness survives physical death."[11] Publications include books on the topic of consciousness, NDEs, reincarnation, and the relationship between mind and the

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[7] "World's Largest Near Death Experiences Study | University of Southampton," October 7, 2014, https://www.southampton.ac.uk/news/2014/10/07-worlds-largest-near-death-experiences-study.page.

[8] Parnia, Sam, Tara Keshavarz Shirazi, Jignesh Patel, Linh Tran, Niraj Sinha, Caitlin O'Neill, Emma Roellke et al. "AWAreness during REsuscitation-II: A Multi-Center Study of Consciousness and Awareness in Cardiac Arrest." *Resuscitation* 191 (2023): 109903.

[9] "World's Largest Near Death Experiences Study | University of Southampton."

[10] Parnia, Sam. *Lucid Dying: The New Science Revolutionizing How We Understand Life and Death* (Hachette Books, 2024).

[11] "Division of Perceptual Studies - University of Virginia School of Medicine," Division of Perceptual Studies, October 28, 2024, https://med.virginia.edu/perceptual-studies/.

physical body.[12] There is also The Center for Consciousness Studies at the University of Arizona.

Other American organizations include the Esalen Institute's Center for Theory and Research. A large proportion of academics and researchers in my dissertation are linked to this institution e.g., Michael Murphy, Jeffery Kripal, Fritjof Capra and others. - 'In 1976 Esalen began a 12-year series on the interface between quantum physics and consciousness."[13] It is now researching innovative areas such as mapping the subtle body. e.g., conference in 2023 on Mapping subtle bodies and esoteric anatomies. "Since our earliest days, Esalen's staff, seminarians, and program leaders have brought us countless questions about chakras, meridians, kundalini experiences and other phenomena that suggest we possess an extra-physical, or "subtle," body that exists alongside our physical frame. "[14] Kripal and Simon Cox lead this study.[15]

Another influential institution is the Institute of Noetic Sciences[16] founded in 1973 by astronaut Dr. Edgar Mitchell explores various PSI topics such as field consciousness studies. Stephan A. Schwartz, famous for remote viewing, Russell Targ,[17] and Rupert Sheldrake's work are also linked to this institute of thinkers who explore outside the box. Pim van Lommel and Bruce Greyson, and Dean Radin's work is linked with this center. In San Francisco CIIS

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[12] "Publications - Division of Perceptual Studies," Division of Perceptual Studies, January 29, 2024, https://med.virginia.edu/perceptual-studies/publications/.

[13] "What Is the Center for Theory & Research? Esalen," n.d., https://www.esalen.org/ctr-main

[14] https://www.esalen.org/ctr-articles/studying-the-subtle-body-102723 (accessed Jan 7, 2024).

[15] Cox, Simon Paul. *The Subtle Body: A Genealogy*. Oxford Studies in Western Esotericism. (Oxford University Press, 2022). "Studying the Subtle Body, CTR Articles," n.d., https://www.esalen.org/ctr-articles/studying-the-subtle-body-102723 (accessed Jan 7, 2024).

[16] The term noetic, derived from the Greek word noētikos, carries with it the idea that a direct knowledge is part of the experience.

[17] Russell Targ, and Harold E. Puthoff. *Mind-Reach: Scientists look at psychic abilities* (Hampton Roads Publishing, 2005).

(California Institute of Integral Studies), founded in 1968 and influenced by Eastern thought, became the birthplace of Transpersonal Psychology. It is linked with scholars such as Stanislav Grof, Charles T. Tart, Jorge Ferrer, Robert McDermott, Dennis McKenna, David Presti, Brian Thomas Swimme, and Richard Tarnas. In March 2024 Iain McGilchrist will participate in a CIIS conference called 'Metaphysics and the Matter with Things' hosted by the Department of Philosophy, Cosmology and Consciousness.[18]

A cross disciplinary approach to the study of NDEs is required because the phenomenon cuts across labels and requires analysis from all kinds of experts in varied fields. Only a team approach can attempt to solve its mysteries. An example of multidisciplinary approaches leads me to mention a practical institution, the first focusing on OBEs and astral travel in the otherworldly realms, and the second in the area of consciousness studies and the survival of consciousness. The Monroe Institute was founded in the early 1970s by Robert A. Monroe, who is famous for exploring otherworldly dimensions and spiritual entities in an out of body state, using visualizations and binaural beats. [19] Its findings frequently replicate the experiences of NDErs.

The International Association for Neath Death Studies, IANDS, (iands.org) was founded in the USA in 1981 and as well as holding conferences, it publishes the Journal of Near-Death Studies[20], and produces social media content on various platforms. IANDS is celebrating 40 years, founded in 1980 by Bruce Greyson, John Audette and Kenneth Ring. It has grown and flourished over the years and has a strong online presence, not just offering data and links to

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[18] "Metaphysics and the Matter With Things: Thinking With Iain McGilchrist | CIIS," CIIS, March 2024, https://www.ciis.edu/events/metaphysics-and-matter-things-thinking-iain-mcgilchrist.

[19] This is Robert Monroe's Website: https://www.monroeinstitute.org/.

[20] The Journal began publication in 1982 under the name *Anabiosis* which was changed to its current title in 1986 with the start of Volume 6.

resources, but offering community, connections, and conferences. In 2022 I attended the IANDS conference in Salt Lake City. There I saw Bigelow, and even spoke with Melvin Morse, Jeffrey Mishlove, Christopher Coppes, Jeff Olsen, Martin Tanner, Jeff O'Driscoll, Daniel Petersen, and Sarah Hinze. There is also The Near-Death Experience Research Foundation (nderf.org) founded in 1998 by Jeffrey Long M.D. NDERF has a solid database collection of testimonies. It defines an NDE as "A lucid experience associated with perceived consciousness apart from the body occurring at the time of actual or threatened imminent death."[21] There are smaller associations such as the Parapsychological Association[22] that take the PSI and paranormal seriously.

In the private sector, Robert T. Bigelow, founder of the Bigelow Institute for Conscious Studies, BICS. Bigelow, a millionaire businessperson, has a keen interest in UAPs and the paranormal, and he is determined to find out the two 'Holy Grail' questions – if we survive death, and if we are alone in the universe.[23] He sponsored a 2021 essay contest about survival of consciousness after death. In the 2021 essay contest on the evidence for life after death, winners included Jeffrey Mishlove,[24] Pim van Lommel and Leo Ruickbie. Runners up included Bernardo Kastrup, Jeffrey Long, Sharon Hewitt Rawlette, Steve Taylor. [25]Twenty-nine winning essays were published with the top prize awarded to Dr. Jeffrey Mishlove. In 2023 an original essay contest researching consciousness and communication with the afterlife and the 'other side' has been announced with up to a million dollars in grants offered for the research. It has been estimated that one in twenty or even 12% of people have had some form of NDE, but not

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[21] Here is a link to NDERF's home page: https://www.nderf.org/index.htm.

[22] Here is a link to the home page for the Parapsychological Association: https://www.parapsych.org/base/about.aspx.

[23] "Can Robert Bigelow (and the Rest of Us) Survive Death?" New York Times, January 21, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/01/21/style/robert-bigelow-UFOs-life-after-death.html.

[24] Mishlove has his own video channel and often discusses topics such as NDEs and other anomalous experiences.

[25] Here is a link to Bigelow's website: https://www.bigelowinstitute.org/.

everyone reports it, so it is more common than might be thought.[26] Some people fear ridicule and chose not to disclose their experiences, and there is no routine procedure in most hospitals to deal with reports, even amongst trained hospital chaplains. The small number who have negative experiences are also afraid to share publicly. Stanislav Grof notes that "despite their potential to revolutionize our understanding of the nature of consciousness and its relationship to the brain, are still dismissed by most professionals as irrelevant hallucinations produced by biological crises of the body and the brain. Near-death experiences are also not routinely recorded and examined as important aspects of the patients' medical history, and most medical facilities offer no specific psychological services to help survivors integrate them." [27] The topic of death is less taboo than in recent decades, indeed not since the Victorian era. Until the 1970s, this negative perspective on death also effectively inhibited scientific interest in the experiences of dying patients and of individuals in near-death situations. The rare exceptions received very little attention, whether they were popular books for the general public, such as Jess E. Weisse's *The Vestibule* and Jean-Baptiste Delacour's *Glimpses of the Beyond* (Weisse 1972, Delacour 1974), or scientific treatises, such as the thorough study of deathbed observations of physicians and nurses conducted by Karlis Osis (Osis 1961). These contributions were relegated to the realm of parapsychology and dismissed as scientifically irrelevant.[28]

Millions of dollars, hours of study and entire lifetimes have been devoted to the exploration of survival after bodily death and NDEs by members of these organizations. Opportunities for progress are optimized in forums where great minds can gather and

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[26] Lee Graves, "Altered States: Scientists Analyze the Near-Death Experience*."* Virginia Magazine, 2007, https://uvamagazine.org/articles/altered_states.

[27] Grof, Stanislav. *The Ultimate Journey: Consciousness and the Mystery of Death* (MAPS, 2006), 25.

[28] Grof, *The Ultimate Journey,* 25.

collaborate. Despite improvements in our understanding of reality and strange experiences there is no breakthrough. Definitive proof has yet to be found but this has not deterred those who quest to understand the mystery of life.

The Scholars Until recently the Academy was resistant to studies that involved the paranormal, magic, UFO's, and mystical experiences. Science seeks to give a naturalistic explanation, as do the social sciences. Religious Studies is now becoming more open, with scholars such as D.L. Pasulka, Hugh B. Urban and Jeffery Kripal breaking new ground. Theologians have the most freedom to write about anomalous experiences, but their influence is often relegated to the margins. Trying to argue that NDEs should be taken at face value is still dismissed by most academics, and thus as a comparative theologian I belong to one of the few disciplines that can discuss the topic 'cum libertate.' At the same time Near- Death Studies is approaching its half century mark. The seminal book *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation* is now almost fifteen years old. [29] A young generation of scholars is now taking the baton into the 21st century. They collaborate to produce more encyclopedic books such as *The Palgrave Handbook of the Afterlife.*[30] Others are more active in writing papers for IANDS conferences, or articles for various journals, often appearing on social media channels, a blossoming platform for academic debate.

Popular Culture The topic of NDEs has blossomed on social media, where tens of thousands of stories and accounts are shared in many forms and on many platforms. There is a

[29] Janice Miner Holden, Bruce Greyson, and Debbie James. *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation* (Praeger, 2009).

[30] Benjamin Matheson, and Yujin Nagasawa. *The Palgrave Handbook of the Afterlife*, Palgrave Frontiers in Philosophy of Religion (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).

genre on Amazon devoted to NDEs. This has happened so rapidly since the internet exploded, that the Library of Congress has not even had time to update its taxonomies and still refers to the genre as "future life.' Famous and better-quality YouTube channels include Jeff Mara's Podcast and Next Level Soul. [31] Others such as NDE -Beyond Life, or The Other Side NDE have a more Evangelical or Christian spin.[32] The book market, social media and conferences are flooded now with self-help books and discussions about death, and it is as if the old taboos are fading. A popular journalist Leslie Kean writes that "I yearn for rational factual answers that are universally true, unfortunately they cannot always be definitive when dealing with issues like this, even if the evidence is highly suggestive."[33] I agree with this limitation. Humans yearn for answers about the afterlife, and there is a need to fill the void caused by disenchantment and the decline of religion. She discusses many aspects of death and survival including prebirth experiences, and the famous 'shoe on the ledge' story by Kimberly Clark Sharp where her patient Maria saw a shoe on a hospital ledge in an OBE, which Sharp later verified.[34] She mentions the work by Kenneth Ring and S. Cooper on how the blind see during NDEs.[35] This is a good general book for a beginner to start as it covers many of the most important arguments and theories in the field. Some books bring a Christian perspective, others import and Eastern influence and are more New Age. These books however are not taken seriously by academics, and most are designated to the genres of personal opinion and entertainment.

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[31] Recommended websites: https://www.youtube.com/@JeffMaraPodcast ; and https://www.youtube.com/@NextLevelSoul.

[32] Recommended: https://www.youtube.com/@nde-beyondlife; and https://www.youtube.com/@TheOtherSideNDEYT

[33] Kean, Leslie. *Surviving Death: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for an Afterlife*. (Crown, 2018), 357.

[34] Kean, *Surviving Death,* 83.

[35] Kean, *Surviving Death,* 95. Also Kenneth Ring, and Sharon Cooper. *Mindsight: Near-Death and Out-of-Body Experiences in the Blind* (iUniverse, 2008).

Since there is no central institution or governing body in charge of order and consistency the whole genre of NDEs can be fluid, diverse and even offer contradictory viewpoints. It is a smorgasbord of ideologies. We use labels in an attempt to impose some kind of standardization but NDEs, VTEs and religious experiences of this sort cannot be limited by their labels, and their components require that their study draws from many disciplines and approaches. Below I will briefly highlight various traditional ways in which NDEs have been approached as an object of study. While all approaches add understanding to the larger phenomena, it is clear after investigating them, that none of them solve the mystery of NDEs and similar strange experiences. They all offer partial windows of clarity, but there are short falls, and none are satisfactory or whole explanations. Nevertheless, it is vital to understand all the approaches in any thorough investigation of this topic.

A Brief Timeline of The Field and the Impact of Contributing Writers.

Theologians throughout history from Augustine and Aquinas to Reformation Protestants have offered up ideas about death and the afterlife, but it was the later 19th century that saw the foundations of the modern field of Near-Death Studies develop, in close relationship with the study of mysticism and religious experience. William James's lectures were paramount in bringing respectability to the topic. [36] The four features James identified in a mystical experience, ineffability, transiency, passivity, and noetic quality are all found in NDEs. [37]Early interest in the field of death and afterlife experiences were discussed in Edward Clarke's book

[36] William James, ed. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (Modern Library, 1902).

[37] Liam O'Malley, "Exploring the Noetic Quality: William James' Insights Into Mystical States and Altered Consciousness," IONS, June 19, 2024, https://noetic.org/blog/noetic-quality/.

Visions: A Study of false Sights, which contains NDEs, although he dismisses them as brain hallucinations. There was also interest shown by parapsychology researchers eager to test if survival after physical death was possible to demonstrate. e.g., William Barrett 1926 and the '*Peak in Darien* "concept.[38] This category has similarities with Mormon deathbed narratives, with its concentration on descriptions of dead relatives coming to escort the dying to the spirit world.

In the 20th century of course, most attention is given to the publishing of Raymond Moody's book *Life after Life* which opened the floodgates and almost gave permission to study NDEs seriously outside the boundaries of theology. [39] It was a watershed moment when past studies came together, and novel studies emerged. Grof says that Raymond Moody's strength was that as a physician and psychologist, he was able to interview survivors when he studied the death experience. [40] Soon afterwards, Karlis Osis and Erlendur Haraldsson offered one of the first academic death bed study observations of the dying. [41]Karlis Osis published papers about his work with questionnaires returned by 640 dying patients and their deathbed visions[42] which echo typical NDEs reported today, such as seeing dead relatives coming to fetch them.[43] He found that the 'hallucinations' were independent of cultural and personality variables. [44] He also makes the association between NDEs and psychedelic experiences. [45]

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[38] Grof, *The Human Encounter,* 136. (Also see Miss F.P. Cobbe 1977, James Hyslop 1908).

[39] Moody, Raymond. *Life after Life*. (Random House, 2016).

[40] Grof, *The Human Encounter*, 153.

[41] Karlis Osis, and Erlendur Haraldsson. "Deathbed Observations by Physicians and Nurses: A Cross-Cultural Survey." *Journal of the American Society for Psychical Research, 71:3* (1977),237-59. Osis, Karlis, and Erlendur Haraldsson. "At the Hour of Death. (rev. ed.)." *New York: Hastings House. (Original work published 1977)* (1986).

[42] Also see Inge B. Corless, "Transitions: Exploring the Frontier." *OMEGA-Journal of Death and Dying* 70, no. 1 (2014): 57-65.

[43] Grof, *The Human Encounter,* 137.

[44] Grof, *The Human Encounter,* 138.

[45] Grof, *The Human Encounter,* 142.

It was Elisabeth Kübler Ross (1926-2004) who had a profound influence both on the field of NDEs and the Hospice movement. She brought much needed attention to the study of death and dying. Since these a long string of names have added their voices to the debate on NDEs: Ian Stevenson, [46], Paul Perry, [47] Jeffrey Long,[48] Kenneth Ring, [49], Keith Ward, Huston Smith, Jens Schlieter, [50] Geddes MacGregor, [51]Christopher Coppes, [52] Allan Kellehear,[53] Christopher Moreman, [54] Peter Stanford, [55] Patricia Pearson, [56] Alan F. Segal, [57] Carol Zaleski, [58] Ptolemy

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[46] Ian Stevenson, *Twenty Cases Suggestive of Reincarnation* (University of Virginia Press, 1980). Ian Stevenson, "Reincarnation." In *Parapsychology*, pp. 224-232. Routledge, 2004.

[47] Melvin Morse, and Paul Perry. *Closer to the Light: Learning from Children's Near-Death Experiences* (Villard Books, 1990). Morse, Melvin. *Where God Lives* (HarperOne, 2019).

[48] Jeffrey Long, and Paul Perry. *God and the Afterlife: The Groundbreaking New Evidence for God and Near-Death Experience* (HarperOne, an imprint of HarperCollins, 2016). Jeffrey Long, Paul Perry, and Near Death Experience Research Foundation. *Evidence of the Afterlife: The Science of Near-Death Experiences* (HarperOne, 2010). J. Steve Miller, and Jeffrey Long. *Near-Death Experiences As Evidence for the Existence of God and Heaven : A Brief Introduction in Plain Language* (Wisdom Creek, 2012).

[49] Kenneth Ring, and Sharon Cooper. *Mindsight: Near-Death and Out-of-Body Experiences in the Blind* (iUniverse, 2008). Kenneth Ring, and Evelyn Elsaesser Valarino. *Lessons from the Light: What we Can Learn from the Near-Death Experience* (Red Wheel/Weiser, 2006).

[50] Jens Schlieter, *What Is It Like to Be Dead? : Christianity, the Occult, and Near-Death Experiences* Oxford Studies in Western Esotericism. (Oxford University Press, 2018).

[51] Geddes MacGregor, *Images of Afterlife: Beliefs from Antiquity to Modern Times* (Paragon House, 1992).

[52] Christophor Coppes, *The Essence of Religions: A Glimpse of Heaven in the Near-Death Experience* (SelectBooks, 2013).

[53] Allan Kellehear, *Visitors at the End of Life: Finding Meaning and Purpose in Near-Death Phenomena* (Columbia University Press, 2020). Kellehear, Allan. *Eternity and Me: The Everlasting Things in Life and Death.* Death, Value and Meaning Series (Routledge, 2016).

[54] Thomas Cattoi, and Christopher Moreman, eds. *Death, Dying, and Mysticism: The Ecstasy of the End*. *Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Study of Mysticism* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2015). Christopher M. Moreman, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying*. Routledge Religion Companions (Routledge, 2018).

[55] Peter Stanford, *Heaven: A Traveller's Guide to the Undiscovered Country* (Harper-Collins, 2002).

[56] Patricia Pearson, *Opening Heaven's Door: Investigating Stories of Life, Death, and What Comes After* (Atria Books, 2014).

[57] Alan F. Segal, *Life After Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West* (Doubleday, 2004). Gregory D. Alles, "Review of Life after Death: A History of the Afterlife in the Religions of the West," *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 74, no. 1 (2006): 235-238, https://muse.jhu.edu/article/196789.

[58] Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys*.

Thompkins, [59] John Martin Fischer,[60] -- Deepak Chopra, [61] Chris Carter, [62] Mark Fox, [63] Michael N. Marsh, [64] Barbara Bradley Hagerty,[65] Stephan A Schwartz,[66] Schwartz, Gary E, [67] Christopher G. White [68] and P.M.H. Atwater.[69]

There is no room in this dissertation to discuss the impact of the work of all these writers. If I am to contribute to this field, I need to know the work that has already been done and what explanations have already been offered. These writers tend to approach NDEs in a similar way. They collect accounts and fit them into a framework of elements. Most of them argue in support of a paranormal explanation. Few engage in Comparative Theology, and few assess the cultural context of the experiences. Their focus is on curating and offering a phenomenological rendition of each experience and allowing the experiences to speak for themselves. As a result, they might be described as 'preaching to the choir.' Reading about the NDEs of others can be moving and inspiriting but cannot replace actual personal experiences. The genre is relegated to the domain of faith and belief, for which there is no definitive proof or generally accepted explanation.

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[59] Ptolemy Tompkins, *The Modern Book of the Dead: A Revolutionary Perspective on Death, the Soul, and What Really Happens in the Life to Come* (Atria Books, 2014).

[60] John Martin Fischer, and Benjamin Mitchell-Yellin, *Near-Death Experiences: Understanding Visions of the Afterlife* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

[61] Deepak Chopra, *Life After Death: The Burden of Proof* (Harmony Books, 2006).

[62] Chris Carter, *Science and the Near-Death Experience: How Consciousness Survives Death* (Inner Traditions, 2010).

[63] Mark Fox, *Religion, Spirituality, and the Near-Death Experience* (Routledge, 2003).

[64] Michael N. Marsh, *Out-Of-Body and Near-Death Experiences Brain-State Phenomena or Glimpses of Immortality?* Oxford Theological Monographs (Oxford University Press, 2010).

[65] Barbara Bradley Hagerty, *Fingerprints of God: The Search for the Science of Spirituality* (Riverhead Books, 2009).

[66] Stephan A. Schwartz, "Nonlocality and Exceptional Experiences: A Study of Genius, Religious Epiphany, and the Psychic." *Explore* 6, no. 4 (2010): 227-236.

[67] Gary E. Schwartz, and William L Simon. *The Afterlife Experiments: Breakthrough Scientific Evidence of Life After Death* (Pocket Books, 2002).

[68] Christopher G. White, *Other Worlds: Spirituality and the Search for Invisible Dimensions* (Harvard University Press, 2018).

[69] P. M. H. Atwater, *Near-Death Experiences, the Rest of the Story: What They Teach us about Living and Dying and our True Purpose* (Hampton Roads Publishing, 2009). P. M. H. Atwater, *The New Children and Near-Death Experiences* (Simon and Schuster, 2003).

There are more names and others mentioned later in this dissertation. The field has mushroomed into a large field of writers and scholars all exploring the frontiers of the afterlife. Grof discusses how afterlife narratives have been dismissed as primitive imaginings, wishful thinking, or the inability to accept impermanence at death. He says few consider that the narrative might reflect actual reality. He believes Western science might have been premature in dismissing ancient wisdom and religions, which have afterlife descriptions.[70] The themes of Death, immortality and eternal life and various s metaphysical hypothesis exploring these possibilities are popular. Ryan T. Byerly tries to grapple with the implications of survival after death and offers the conclusions of conferences and scholarly essays on the topic.[71]

The Palgrave Handbook of the Afterlife, a rich resource outlining both the history of afterlife ideas and presenting different religious and non-religious explanations, has a chapter about NDEs written by Mark Fox.[72] Again one's own disposition determines one's choice of explanation. Fox notes not only the large number of consistent NDE reports coming from all cultures and even from the non-religious, but also the large number of studies trying to explain them.[73] Christopher Moreman is also a valuable resource for investigating afterlife studies and he writes about NDEs.[74] Whilst noting similarities with NDE reports and other psi phenomena, he admits that there are many unresolved questions including the nature of the observer in the out of body state and the source of the realm of the state visited, if any. It seems to me that the more NDEs are investigated the more questions are raised, and the lack of clear definitive answers or

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[70] Grof, *The Human Encounter*, 158.

[71] T. Ryan Byerly, ed. *Death, Immortality, and Eternal Life* (Routledge, 2021).

[72] Mark Fox, "Do Near-Death Experiences Provide Evidence of an Afterlife?" in *The Palgrave Handbook of the Afterlife*, ed. Yujin Nagasawa and Benjamin Matheson (Springer, 2017), 415.

[73] Fox, "Do Near-Death Experiences Provide Evidence of an Afterlife?" 419.

[74] Christopher M. Moreman, *Beyond the Threshold: Afterlife Beliefs and Experiences in World Religions* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 207-24.

explanations. He concludes: "40 years after the term 'NDE' was coined, that the quest to find the NDE equivalent of a white crow – a case that proves beyond doubt that at the point of death something leaves the body – has so far drawn a blank."[75]

(i) Natural Explanations: Hard Sciences, Cognitive Science, Neuroscience, and Consciousness Studies

Naturalistic Explanations of NDEs

Science argues fiercely against NDEs because the phenomenon threatens the assumptions upon which science is based. Until science develops more and expands its paradigm this will remain the case, and anything seen as paranormal will be excluded from serious study and dismissed. There are two opposing views which revolve around how mind and matter interact and a disagreement over which is primary. Some physicists are challenging the old universe as a machine trope such as Donald Hoffman and James Jeans who stated that "The universe begins to look like a great thought than a great machine. Mind no longer appears as an accidental intruder into the realm of matter."[76] Max Planck envisioned realities existing apart from our sense perceptions.[77]

The centuries old science versus religion debate has not been solved and this impasse is reflected in the Science Versus NDE debate. Many arguments held against the supernatural, the supranatural and religious experience hold sway in modern society and reflect the atheistic

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[75] Moreman, *Beyond the Threshold,* 432. The *white crow* refers to William James assertion that to prove a point one only needs one instance, so to prove not all crows or black only one white needs to be proven to exist.

[76] James Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe*. New rev.ed. (Macmillan, 1937),137.

[77] Max Planck, *The Universe in the Light of Modern Physics*, Translated by W. H Johnston (W.W. Norton, 1931), 107.

naturalist paradigm. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to solve this debacle, h0wever mentioning this state of affairs is appropriate. Most physicians dismiss NDEs as hallucination or give similar arguments suggesting this is a brain generated delusion. However, as Imants Barušs points out, "There are numerous problems with such an (materialist) argument, but perhaps the key challenge lies with veridical temporal anchors to points in time at which an experiencer's brain was not functioning in the manner that is necessary to produce phenomenal consciousness."[78]

Pam Reynold's famous case [79] comes to mind and then the argument of shared death experiences where more than one person can share the NDE. Some philosophers even dismiss NDEs. Yet popular opinion shows a heavy interest in the topic and a desire to believe. Freudians might argue that NDEs are 'wishful thinking', resulting from the childish desire for a creator Father God. Technically God might exist or not exist regardless of our desire for God to exist. I will concede however that 'wishful thinking' does seem to influence the co-creation aspect of what is seen in the afterlife. Most mainstream academics agree with the thesis of Susan Blackmore who has written many books and articles on consciousness and NDEs. [80] She had an OBE as a young woman in the 1970s and investigated supernatural explanations, but years later when she learned of the work of Dr Wilder Penfield in the 1930s, and a brain area that there is a spot in the brain that can produce partial autoscopy and flashbacks when stimulated, she chose this answer to her

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[78] Imants Barušs, *Death as an Altered State of Consciousness : A Scientific Approach* (American Psychological Association, 2023), 152.

[79] Michael Sabom, *Light and Death: One Doctor's Fascinating Account of Near-Death Experiences* (Zondervan. 1988), 43, 49.

[80] Susan Blackmore, *Dying to Live: Near-Death Experiences* (Prometheus books, 1993). Susan J. Blackmore, *Beyond the Body: An Investigation of Out-of-the-Body Experiences (*Academy Chicago Publishers, 2005).

question of the origin of OBEs.[81] Dr. Josef Parvizi indeed did discover that an OBE like experience can be provoked by stimulation however this does not explain away all OBEs as merely physical, not the veridical experiences of autoscopy. [82]. She provides us with the stark choice: either there is a soul, or we invent a mythical soul. Blackmore is one of the few experiencers to not be swayed from agnosticism to a more spiritual approach.

Astral projection might just be a brain trick. Blackmore is right when she says that supernatural explanations cannot be scientifically proven. This is the crux of the difficulty. She narrows down the possibilities, NDEs are real because they are consistent and seem very real, they are paranormal, or they are simply transformative natural experiences. She chooses the dying brain hypothesis and rejects all the other explanations. She soberly concludes "We are biological organisms, evolved in fascinating ways for no purpose at all and with no end in mind. We are simply here, and this is how it is." [83] Blackmore now argues that the NDE is hallucinatory, and a result of natural opiates being released when the brain shuts down.[84] There is no evidence that oxygen deprivation causes NDEs according to Fenwick.[85] This debate is stuck at an impasse.

Ann Taves approaches the study of religious experience from a scientific perspective, after coming from a Religious Studies background. She has developed the Inventory of non-

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[81]Susan Blackmore, *Dying to Live: Near-Death Experiences* (Prometheus books, 1993), 210. Susan Blackmore, *Seeing Myself: What Out-of-Body Experiences Tell us About Life, Death, and the Mind* (Robinson, 2017).

[82] Brett L. Foster, Vinitha Rangarajan, William R. Shirer, et al. "Intrinsic and Task-Dependent Coupling of Neuronal Population Activity in Human Parietal Cortex." *Neuron* 86, no. 2 (2015): 578-590. Dian Lyu, James Robert Stieger, Cindy Xin, et al. "Causal Evidence for the Processing Of Bodily Self In The Anterior Precuneus." *Neuron* 111, no. 16 (2023): 2502-2512.

[83] Blackmore, *Dying to Live,* 264.

[84] Susan Blackmore, "Near-Death Experiences." in *Parapsychology Research on Exceptional Experiences,* ed. Jane Henry (Routledge, 2004): 196-203.

[85] Peter Fenwick, and Elizabeth Fenwick. *The Truth in The Light: An Investigation of Over 300 Near-Death Experiences* (Berkley Books, 1997), 213.

ordinary experiences.[86] She says, “Although, many researchers in psychology, religious studies, and psychiatry recognize that there is overlap in the experiences their subjects recount, disciplinary silos and challenges involved in comparing reported experiences have left us with little understanding of the mechanisms, whether biological, psychological, and/or sociocultural, through which these experiences are represented and differentiated.”[87] Her work on the explanations of extraordinary experiences is important in placing ‘fits, trances and visions’ into a historical and Western context which explains how these experiences are understood.[88] Taves has referred to extraordinary religious experiences, what she calls “revelatory events,” as the “building blocks” of religion.[89] She implies that extraordinary events are built up into religious forms depending on their cultural context. A weakness in such a position is that it neglects religious claims and privileges naturalistic explanations. In fact, both a cultural and a religious source of the experiences might be true.

Physicians and Biologists

Mainstream biology would hold that we are simply our bodies, and that we are animals evolved from earlier biological life forms. Mind would be explained an epiphenomenon of the brain and life after death and NDEs would be ruled out as fantasy. Not all biologists agree. Bruce

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[86] Ann Taves et al. "The Inventory of Nonordinary Experiences (INOE): Evidence of Validity in the United States and India," *PloS One* 18, no. 7 (2023): e0287780, https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0287780. The link for Taves’s academic website at UCSB is https://remlab.religion.ucsb.edu/about/inventory.

[87] Ann Taves, "Mystical and Other Alterations in Sense of Self: An Expanded Framework for Studying Nonordinary Experiences," *Perspectives on Psychological Science* 15, no. 3 (2020): 669.

[88] Ann Taves, *Fits, Trances, and Visions: Experiencing Religion and Explaining Experience from Wesley to James* (Princeton University Press, 2020).

[89] Ann Taves, “Building Blocks of Sacralities: A New Basis for Comparison Across Cultures and Religions,” in *Handbook of Psychology of Religion and Spirituality*, 2nd ed., ed. Raymond F. Paloutzian and Crystal Park (Guilford Press, 2013). For a full demonstration of the method, see Ann Taves, *Revelatory Events: Three Case Studies of the Emergence of New Spiritual Paths* (Princeton University Press, 2016).

Lipton is a biologist who investigates psi phenomena, epigenetics, how consciousness affects cells, and who argues that mind, body, and spirit are interconnected.[90] Biology's explanations for NDEs are unconvincing. NDEs cannot be explained by medications because they can occur in situations without drugs and illness. Nor is anoxia a sufficient explanation because NDE experiences are clear and logical and not muddled or confused. Modern resuscitation technique resulted in many patients being revived and returned from 'clinical death' or from the brink of death.

It is not necessary to have 'died' to have an NDE, and many traumas or severe illnesses can provoke the experience. However modern medicine has increased the number of cases of NDEs, because in the past such patients would have died. Several of the preeminent scholars investigating NDEs are physicians and medical doctors who either had patients with NDEs, such as cardiologists Pim Van Lommel and Michael Sabom and also Sam Parnia who researches cardiopulmonary resuscitation. Michael Sabom, author of *Recollections of Death* (Sabom 1982), discusses the famous case of Pam Reynolds, who witnessed her own surgery, and argues that NDEs cannot result from brain processes.

Another medical researcher who tried to discover proof of veridical evidence of OBE observations of the hospital setting during an NDEs is Penny Sartori who found mixed results.[91] van Lommel et al. (2001)[92] found no correlation between the occurrence of NDEs and resuscitation technique, types of drugs administered during surgery, fear of death, foreknowledge

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[90] Bruce H. Lipton, *The Biology of Belief: Unleashing the Power of Consciousness, Matter and Miracles* (Mountain of Love/Elite Books, 2005).

[91] Penny Sartori, *Wisdom of Near-Death Experiences: How Understanding NDEs Can Help Us Live More Fully* (Watkins Media Limited, 2014),133–4.

[92] Pim Van Lommel, Ruud Van Wees, Vincent Meyers, et al. "Near-Death Experience in Survivors of Cardiac Arrest: A Prospective Study in the Netherlands." *The Lancet* 358, no. 9298 (2001): 2039-2045.

of NDEs, or education. So, like others, she moved from trying to explain them, to focusing on their transformative personal aftereffects.[93] Sam Parnia contributes articles to a Journal called Resuscitation.[94] Parnia argues against those who suggest that NDEs are a brain product saying that when people have no blood flowing into their brain and their body is shut down, there is no hidden brain area that somehow is still working. Instead, he thinks we need to reconsider the nature of consciousness and not assume it is created in the brain.[95] He believes that from evidence he has seen that consciousness is not annihilated after death.[96] One famous and influential brain surgeon Alexander, Eben. [97] made the leap from (i) to (ii) atheist to believer. Looking for a supranatural explanation. His account of leaving is body, navigating the Void, and meeting his sister spirit guide is well known in popular culture. His experience changed his life, and he is a fervent convert to the 'supernatural' worldview.

Most scientist and physicians would dismiss NDE claims using various chemical and physiological arguments, blaming the experiences on drugs and delirium. Peter Fenwick, a British neuropsychiatrist, and President of the British branch of IANDS doubts that NDEs can be

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[93] Sartori, Penny, and Kelly Walsh. *The Transformative Power of Near-Death Experiences: How the Messages of NDEs Can Positively Impact the World.* (Watkins Media Limited, 2017).

[94] European Resuscitation Council, American Heart Association, Australian Resuscitation Council, and New Zealand Resuscitation Council. "Resuscitation," 1972.

[95] Brandon Keim, Consciousness After Death: Strange Tales From the Frontiers of Resuscitation Medicine. *Science*. April 24, 2013. https://www.wired.com/2013/04/consciousness-after-death/

[96] Keim, Consciousness After Death.

[97] Eben Alexander, *The Map of Heaven: How Science, Religion, and Ordinary People Are Proving the Afterlife* (Simon & Schuster, 2014).

explained by physiological and chemical changes in the brain He has had his own journey searching for cosmic transcendence.[98] He said,

> I am absolutely sure that such experiences are not caused by oxygen shortages,[99] endorphins[100], or anything of that kind. And certainly none of these things would account for the transcendental quality of many of these experiences, the fact that people feel an infinite sense of loss when they leave them behind ... What is also quite clear is that any disorientation of brain function leads to a disorientation of perception and reduced memory. You cannot normally get highly structured and clearly remembered experiences from a highly damaged or disoriented brain."[101]

Pediatrician Melvin Morse MD first came across NDEs with his patient, a young Mormon child, called 'Katie.' Katie witnessed her drowning, met a guide, and deceased relatives, and then met Jesus and Heavenly Father, but she had not been exposed to ideas such as a tunnel which she experienced. I met both of them in Salt Lake City in 2022 and Katie (aka Kristle Merzlock-Westover) recounted her 1984 VTE.[102] She is a Mormon and the event counts as a VTE with all the classic elements. This experience and others following, changed his agnostic mind around and he became a prolific writer in the field of Near-Death Studies. [103]

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[98] P. B. C. Fenwick, *Shining Light on Transcendence: The Unconventional Journey of a Neuroscientist* (White Crow Books, 2019). Peter Fenwick, "Dying: A Spiritual Experience as Shown by Near Death Experiences and Deathbed Visions," (2004), https://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/docs/default-source/members/sigs/spirituality-spsig/spirituality-special-interest-group-publications-pfenwickneardeath.pdf. Peter Fenwick, "Can Near Death Experiences (NDEs) Contribute to the Debate on Consciousness?" *Archives of Clinical Psychiatry* 40, no. 5 (2013): 203-207. Sam Parnia, Ken Spearpoint, Gabriele de Vos, et al. "AWARE—AWAreness during REsuscitation—A Prospective Study." *Resuscitation* 85, no. 12 (2014): 1799–1805.

[99] P. B. C. Fenwick, and Elizabeth Fenwick. *The Truth in the Light: An Investigation of over 300 Near-Death Experiences* (White Crow Books, 2011), 214.

[100] Fenwick, *Truth in the Light,* 218.

[101] Grof, *The Ultimate Journey*,173. -- Fenwick, *Truth in the Light.*

[102] Melvin Morse, and Paul Perry, *Closer to the Light* (Random House Digital, Inc., 1991). 1-9. Karen Boren Swedin Staff Writer, "Doctor Probes Mysteries of Near-Death Experiences," *Deseret News*, January 28, 2024, https://www.deseret.com/1990/11/8/18890188/doctor-probes-mysteries-of-near-death-experiences/. https://iandsutah.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/02/iands-11-08-aug-2011-christal-westover.mp3.

[103] Melvin Morse, and Paul Perry, *Parting Visions: Uses and Meanings of Pre-Death, Psychic, and Spiritual Experiences* (Villard Books, 1994). Melvin Morse, and Paul Perry. *Transformed by the Light: The Powerful Effect of Near-Death Experiences on People's Lives* (Villard Books, 1992). Karen Boren Swedin Staff Writer, "Doctor Probes Mysteries of Near-Death Experiences," *Deseret News*, January 28, 2024, https://www.deseret.com/1990/11/8/18890188/doctor-probes-mysteries-of-near-death-experiences/.

Russell Noyes M.D., (1934-2023) professor of psychiatry also discovered a uniformity in NDEs, and he divided the stages into resistance, life review and transcendence.[104]

Main stream medicine and biology are still rooted in the paradigm of the brain producing consciousness and experiences. They cannot explain the mystery of spontaneous healing so commonly seen when the 'dead' return to life. Nevertheless, with the development of Elon Musk's brain chips, and artificial intelligence, the future might redefine all of these views and assumptions. The idea that the human body is an avatar is not so far-fetched. It is currently established that mind and body are so interconnected that intention and mental states impact diseases. Certainly, many agnostic physicians have been transformed by witnessing the NDEs of their patients and question their previous worldview. These authors hold a sympathetic position to NDEs. The main criticism against their position is that there is no scientific proof that their claims are correct.

Physics

One of my favorite books retells the history and links between physics and exploration of different states of consciousness, *How the Hippies Saved Physics: Science, Counterculture, and the Quantum Revival* by David Kaiser. [105] It tells the story of the Fundamental Fysiks Group, founded in 1976 by Jack Sarfatti and Fred Alan Wolf, and how many physicists from other universities often met in Berkely to discuss their ideas. It is no accident that at this time Eastern spirituality was in vogue in California as well as experimentation with psychedelics. They

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[104] Grof, *The Human Encounter,*148.

[105] David Kaiser, *How the Hippies Saved Physics: Science, Counterculture, and The Quantum Revival.* (WW Norton & Company, 2011).

rejected substance dualism and Cartesian assumptions about reality and hypothesized about the connection between quantum states and mysticism.[106]

These hippy scientists 'saved physics' in three ways according to Kaiser. (i) They reopened free speculation and looked for the big picture, and metaphysical meaning in the cosmos. (ii) They highlighted Bell's Theorem and his ideas of non-locality and entanglement. This states that quantum objects that have had an interaction retain a connection even if they move apart. (iii) They expanded Bell's theorem to explain Psi and spiritual mediumship contact with the dead. The symbol of yin/yang represents how opposite can form a whole, it can represent how a Newtonian fragmented universe is overthrown by a unitive holistic quantum view. Their ideas show how a vibrant society infused with new ideas from Buddhism and psychedelic knowledge can produce a flowering of scientific culture.

In agreement with this view, I hold that mind creates matter, and all reality is interconnected. Mind and matter are not total opposite polarities but like yin and yang, intertwined and in synchronicity. As the NDEs show, the mind comes out of the body but there is still a connection and interdependence. They interact and are not totally separate. The mind leaves and returns to the body. Minds can exist out of body, but bodies have a role to play in aiding consciousness to manifest as form. Physicist Brain Greene suggests that string theory might hold the key to understanding the mysteries of the universe such as alternative dimensions and holes in the space /time fabric of space.[107] Frank J, Tipler**,** is known for his discussion of the Omega Point Theory, which he identifies as God, and which he connects to his own belief in

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[106] Descartes met an angel in visions and received knowledge. See Rupert Sheldrake et al., *Chaos, Creativity, and Cosmic Consciousness* (Simon and Schuster, 2001), 94.

[107] Brian Greene, *The Elegant Universe: Superstrings, Hidden Dimensions, and the Quest for the Ultimate Theory* (W.W. Norton & Company, 1999). Brian Greene, *The Fabric of the Cosmos: Space, Time, and the Texture of Reality* (A.A. Knopf, 2004).

immorality, resurrection and eternal life after death. [108] So, while science and religion are considered antithetical, many scientists try to reconcile the two.

Quantum Physics

Pylkkänen, Paavo[109] is one of a modern generation of scholars investigating the links between human mind and the quantum fields in physics and warning of the huge implications for philosophy if the model is correct. He says, "One of the central questions of philosophy is the relationship between the mind and the world, the subject and the object, the knower and the known. Quantum theory implies radical changes to our picture of the world. If we then say that even mental phenomena are in some ways quantum-like it seems that we have radically changed the philosophical situation. We would then have the quantum-like mind trying to understand itself, the quantum world, and the relation between itself and the quantum world." [110]Philip Groff said, "Physics tell us nothing about what an electron is beyond what it does." [111]

Quantum Physicists have offered a post Newtonian view of understanding reality, and their perspective might offer a way to understand NDEs through explanations of human consciousness and its connection with other realms that theoretically exist outside space and time. Werner Karl Heisenberg (1901-1976) taught that we can no longer speak of the behavior of the particle independently of the process of observation. 'Nor is it any longer possible to ask

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[108] Frank J. Tipler, *The Physics of Immortality: Modern Cosmology, God, and the Resurrection of the Dead* (Doubleday, 1994).

[109] Paavo Pylkkänen, "Is the Brain Analogous to a Quantum Measuring Apparatus?" In *Metaphors and Analogies in Sciences and Humanities: Words and Worlds*, pp. 215-235. Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021. This is an amazing new perspective which links analogous experiences and physics.

[110] Pylkkänen, Is the Brain Analogous,16. -- See also Pylkkänen, Paavo. "Quantum theories of consciousness." In *The Routledge Handbook of Consciousness*, pp. 216-231. Routledge, 2018. -- Hiley, Basil J., and Paavo Pylkkänen. "Can Quantum Mechanics Solve the Hard Problem Of Consciousness?" (2022).

[111] Philip Goff, *Consciousness and Fundamental Reality* (Oxford University Press, 2017), 136. Kripal, 2019, 110, 21.

whether or not these particles exist in space and time objectively. When we speak of the picture of nature in the exact science of our age, we do not mean a picture of nature so much as a *picture of our relationships with nature*. ...Science no longer confronts nature as an objective observer but sees itself as an actor in this interplay between man and nature.'[112] Heisenberg agreed with Fritjof Capra's ideas, heralding the similar perspectives of Eastern religions and the New Physics.[113]

After discussing the cosmos and reality with Rabindranath Tagore Heisenberg explained: "some of the ideas that seemed so crazy suddenly made much more sense,"[114] Menas Kafatos suggests that QT (quantum physics) has implications beyond the physical world, "Extending Orthodox quantum mechanics, leading to universal non-dual Awareness may provide a consistent and integrated view of reality."[115] He suggests that the mystery of subjective experience might be solved by QT, given the role of observation and that this framework would be in accordance with Eastern spiritualities.

Today the CERN center in Switzerland is building an even bigger Hadron Collider in order to examine the tiniest of particles to discover how our universe works. They are hunting for ghost particles that exist in equations.[116] Physics is often quite theoretical, and while they can describe black holes, they cannot physically explore them. Human experiences are subjective and cannot be proven like scientific experiments. Perhaps if science advances the theoretical and experiential might come closer together. Roger Penrose, a mathematical physicist proposed the

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[112] Werner Heisenberg, *The Physicist's Conception of Nature* (Hutchinson, 1958).

[113] Fritjof Capra, *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of The Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism* (Shambhala Publications, 1975).

[114] Fritjof Capra, *Uncommon Wisdom : Conversations with Remarkable People* (Bantam Books, 1989).

[115] Menas Kafatos, and Keun-Hang Susan Yang. "The Participating Mind in the Quantum Universe." , *Cosmos and History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 14, no. 1: 40-55. 2018.

[116] Pallab Ghosh, *CERN: Scientists Search for Mysterious Ghost Particles.* 24 March 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/science-environment-68631692.

Orchestrated Objective Reduction theory (Orch OR) which locates the origin of consciousness at the quantum level.[117] His approach has been emulated by others such as Stuart Hameroff MD and Deepak Chopra MD to discuss the possibility of a quantum soul.[118]

Some interesting theirs have been proposed which, if validated, might explain NDEs. One is the theory of the Holographic Universe which is suggested by Michael Talbot.[119] Fred Alan Wolf, F. David Peat, David Bohm, and Karl Pribram have all referred to this possibility as part of a physics of consciousness, and this might be an alternative way to look at the universe. This theory might explain telepathy, OBEs and NDEs. Amit Goswami suggests that consciousness is the foundation of the universe, and that self-awareness interconnects all creation.[120] The hologram theory is not meant to be literal but really an analogy of how reality exists. Just as cut sections of a hologram display the whole image then a laser is shone through it, so the entire universe might be reflected in parts of the universe, like us, according to the macrocosm in the microcosm idea. The origins of this theory come from the work of David Bohm and Karl Pribham, but Talbot took it to explain how OBEs, alien abduction, NDEs and shamanic journeying, which seem related and similar, come about.

One of the most interesting aspects of this holographic model is its participatory aspects, meaning that whatever we perceive, especially in altered states of consciousness, is altered by our own input and expectations. Talbot suggests that this explains the diverse types of visions

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[117] Amanda L. Collins, "Orchestrated Objective Reduction: Quantum Physics and its Implications in Human Consciousness." *College of William and Mary—Degree Program thesis* (2015).

[118] Stuart Hameroff, and Deepak Chopra. "The "Quantum Soul": A Scientific Hypothesis," in *Exploring Frontiers of The Mind-Brain Relationship,* ed. Alexander Moreira-Almeida (Springer New York, 2011), 79-93.

[119] Michael Talbot, *The Holographic Universe.* (HarperCollins,1991),1. -- Ring, Grof, McKenna, F. David Peat and Fred Alan Wolf accept this model. Michael Talbot, *Mysticism and the New Physics.* (Penguin, 1993).

[120] Amit Goswami, *The Self-Aware Universe: How Consciousness Creates the Material World.* (Tarcher, 1993). -- Amit Goswami, *Physics of the Soul: The Quantum Book of Living, Dying, Reincarnation, and Immortality* (Hampton Roads Publishing, 2013).

seen in NDEs according to religion and culture.[121] This co-creative aspect is seen in NDEs where the deceased are free from disease and appear young and healthy, where houses and food can appear at will despite no need for them. Then there is the ability to see in all directions and have access to all knowledge. NDErs also describe light, frequencies, vibrations and altered time and space. Heaven seems to be holographic too. Could Spirit World and *Bardo* be holograms?

Talbot reports that Sri Yukteswar Giri from Puri India in the 1920s, and who met Evans-Wentz, could apparently travel to the afterlife and return using yogic methods. He said it was a beautiful realm, full of light and color and said a thought could materialize a whole garden of fragrant flowers.[122] Incidentally Talbot was himself a purported alien abductee and received visions as a child, which he believed informed his insights.[123]

Robert Lanza's Theory of Biocentrism, from the perspective of both physics and biology, adds another voice to those who argue that life and consciousness are keys to understanding the universe.[124] He suggests that life creates the universe and boils down his theory to eleven principles. Our perception of reality involves out consciousness, space and time are not independent, but linked to human and animal perception, and all particles are linked to the observer. Matter exists in a state of probability and only manifests when consciousness is aware of it and observes it. The universe is fine tuned for life, and this conscious life creates the universe. Observers define the structure of physical reality. Therefore, he asserts that fat from

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[121] Talbot, *Holographic Universe*. Talbot, *Mysticism and the New Physics,* 247.

[122] Yogananda Paramahansa, *Autobiography of a Yogi* (Self-Realization Fellowship, 1973), 475-97. Sri Aurobindo also discovered a realm beyond space and time, made of a multicolored infinity of vibrations.-- Satprem, *Sri Aurobindo or the Adventure of Consciousness.* (Institute for Evolutionary Research. 1984),195.

[123] Cosmic Wonderer. "Michael Talbot - the Larger Picture of UFOs - Thinking Allowed," November 14, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4x7yiEX_xQU.

[124] Robert Lanza, and Bob Berman, Biocentrism: How Life And Consciousness Are The Keys To Understanding The True Nature Of The Universe (BenBella Books, 2010). Robert Lanza, Matej Pavšič, and Bob Berman, *The Grand Biocentric Design: How Life Creates Reality* (BenBella Books, Inc., 2020).

being a dumb, dead, random universe, it is quite the opposite, intelligent, alive, and purposeful. The implication is that at death consciousness does not cease to exist, it just changes the form of its vehicle. He says, 'If consciousness is everywhere and never discontinuous then there's no death to experience…so biocentrism has handed you the *no death card*."[125]

Gary Zukav's writings present QT to the public in a readable manner.[126] The central message he presents is that consciousness is the heart of all human experience and conceptions and also that humans play a role in the creation of reality that is experienced. He also links this idea to spirituality in some of his other works. Quantum physics and spirituality seem to be perfect partners and there is a genre of studies linking the two. Capra's book *The Tao of Physics* 1975 was highly influential and became a bestseller, serendipitously the same year Moody's *Life after Life* was published. Capra described the similar approaches, connections and conclusions of Buddhism, Hinduism, and New Physics.

I have independently through my years of reading reached similar conclusions about the interconnectivity of consciousness. Capra, like Talbot, came to actually have an expansive experience, giving him insights aside from his scientific work. One day he sat on a beach and became immersed with all his senses in a cosmic dance of rhythmic energy from the sun which he intuitively knew was the dance of Shiva. It is no accident that a large statue of Shiva Nataraja is placed outside CERN in Switzerland representing the cosmic cycles of birth, death, renewal, cosmic play of the ever-changing illusion of the world in endless time and release. Even as I write this dissertation more and more discoveries are being made. In 2022 the death of an 87-year-old was recorded in an EEG for the first time and there appeared to be increased neuronal

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[125] Lanza, *Grand Biometric Design,* 200.

[126] Gary Zukav, *The Dancing Wu Li masters: An Overview of the New Physics*. (HarperOne, 2009). – Gary Zukav, *The Seat of the Soul* (Simon & Schuster, 1990).

coherence similar to patterns produced by dreaming and memory recall. Dr. Zemmar noted it is similar to the recall described in NDEs.[127] This event will certainly attract similar investigations.

Physics studies the physical world of reality. It has also ventured into the study of unseen worlds at the micro and macro level but this I by means of mathematics and equations. While this is essential and relevant work it is often speculative and theoretical. Equations can be very powerful as representations of reality, but they are not alive, and they lack that inner consciousness that we, as living beings, enjoy. Physics can seem to be too theoretical and abstract. How much is the difference between an equation, which most of us fail to comprehend, or a visceral and raw religious experience. Physics is intellectual and NDEs are emotional and involve the whole soul.

Altered perception in NDE science already knows we perceive color differently that we assume…red is not a quality of a rose….and different people see different hues. E.g., color blindness. Yet how to explain perfect sense perception in NDEs without sensory organs? It is bizarre. This is why I think it is essential for physicists, philosophers and experiencers to work together.

I am not a scientist, and only have a lay understanding of this discipline, but I am aware that society respects scientific conclusions and accepts them differently than purported religious 'truths.' While Lanza, Capra, Zukav and Talbot's conclusions are speculative their approach seems to resonate with religious claims about the nature of reality. I suggest both science and religion are both trying to explain the nature of reality, and are using different language to

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[127] Raul Vicente, Michael Rizzuto, Can Sarica, et al. "Enhanced Interplay of Neuronal Coherence and Coupling in the Dying Human Brain." *Frontiers in Aging Neuroscience* 14 (2022): 813531. Frontiers Science Communications and Frontiers Science Communications, "A Replay of Life: What Happens in Our Brain When We Die? - Frontiers | Science News," *Frontiers Science News* (blog), August 22, 2023, https://www.frontiersin.org/news/2022/02/22/what-happens-in-our-brain-when-we-die.

describe it, and that their separation might not be as wide as assumed. Quantum Consciousness and multiverses filled with divine beings are possibilities. Many OBE reports describe passing through the particles of walls and ceilings, entering other dimensions and time/space realms, and floating past planets. In NDEs there are reports of seeing matter in terms of particles, vibrations, frequencies and entering different dimensions. Is the tunnel a wormhole or portal into another dimension? There are so many questions and possibilities. What is needed is for physicists to take these reports and try to find systems that can explain them. Scientist and philosophers must work together to find answers to these mysteries. Not all scientists are reductionist. Even science has room for difference of opinions.

The position of these aforementioned physicists is encouraging but they represent only a small number of their profession. The mainstream still resists the psi implications of their theories. In general science disregards stories about ghosts and sprits but in folklore and religion this is accepted. I have had my own strange experiences. Supernatural and mystical experiences are taken very seriously by many people who have faith in their own non-scientific explanations. So even if science offers naturalistic explanations, it does not guarantee their acceptance. Mormons and Tibetans will still believe in their version of the afterlife.

(ii) Supranatural Explanations (psychological, social sciences) [128]

Another group of academics who focus on NDEs are psychiatrists and psychologists, who try to find explanations for NDEs from their knowledge of the human mind and behaviors

[128] Supranatural is used here to mean theories which are not yet explained by science, but which could be in the future, and which are therefore neither natural not supernatural. The terms supernatural and preternatural have also been interchanged in the past.

which stem from the brain. Sociologists and social anthropologists also study human behavior and beliefs but from the perspective of how society and culture shape behaviors.

Social sciences and the role of culture The social sciences, sociology, and the related disciplines social anthropology, of history and folklore, often attempt to explain religious experiences, including NDEs, on the basis that humans are not just individuals, but that they are also members of a larger society. If biology is the 'nature' part of the debate, sociology is about the 'nurture' aspect. In other words, all humans have similar brains and physiology, but their societies have adapted and evolved and molded the human child into ways of seeing the world and resulted in diverse perspectives on the reality of Earth life. Religions are an expression of this diversity, and these religious experiences are embedded in culture.

Joseph Campbell was an expert in mythology, and who developed the theory of the hero, which he called a universal monomyth. This was the story of the hero, either male or female, who leaves his or her home ground and, after fantastic adventures, returns as a deified being. Campbell found that the archetype of the hero's journey typically has three stages, similar to those described earlier as characteristic sequences in traditional rites of passage: separation, initiation, and return.[129] The idea of a journey of self-discovery and rites of passage could actually be applied to the NDE, the only difference being that the adventure is otherworldly instead of to terrestrial fantastical realms. In this case stories of heroes and stories of NDEr and Delogs fit into a similar pattern, and both have a narrative function in a society. They fall into the

[129] Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces*, Vol. 17 (New World Library, 2008). Grof, *Ultimate Journey,* 54.

realm of an oral tradition, and whereas the story of Jason was retold to listeners sitting around community fires in the evenings, modern audiences tune into the JeffMara podcast.

Early sociologists focused on the social origin of religions, and often studied indigenous spirituality, often denigrating it and labeling it 'uncivilized' or 'primitive.' There was the colonialist idea that 'modern *man*' was rational and superior in hierarchy of religions, and no longer needed superstitious ideas. This assumption is still buried in many approaches to religious experiences such as NDEs, as if those who accept them as true are childish and unsophisticated, credulous, persons. Protestantism pushed God so far away, and Deists regulated God to a separated status, but the New Religions such as Neo-Paganism are pushing back and trying to bring the divine back into the sphere is nature and personal experience. Mormonism and Tibetan Buddhism are traditions that exhibit communication with other realms, and while the Tibetans have shamanic aspects to their practice, Mormons pray and seek promptings of the Holy Ghost and guidance as they read the scriptures. In both cases the Otherworlds are near and here, not far and distant.

One of the more popular atheistic, naturalistic explanations of NDEs claims is that they are hallucinations filled with cultural expectations. This is often referred to as contextualism. John Martin Rischer, a distinguished philosopher at UCR has studied NDEs, and thanatology and in 2012 received over five million dollars from the John Templeton Foundation to study immortality. The conclusion of the Immortality Project was to dismiss supernatural explanations but to find value in NDEs as fulfilling a social function, and to suggest that NDEs were meaning making stories. Fischer, who holds the dominant position that visions and psychedelic trips emerge only from the brain, avoided questions of truth, and the goal was not to convince skeptics, but focused on how the experiences made meaning in the lives of experiencers. He did

concede there are similarities in the experience across cultures OBEs but more fundamentally humans everywhere have always sought to understand death and ways to overcome it.[130]

I agree with him that after death reflections have an important impact on how we live and that NDEs transform lives, such as Eben Alexander's life.[131] In 2017 Fischer and Mitchell-Yellin issued a bestseller on the topic of NDEs in which they argued that the tools of science are compatible explaining them and that supernatural explanations are superfluous.[132] They argued that essentially, we believe what we want to believe. While an academically cautious Fischer concedes that the experiences are real for the experiencer, and focused on the metaphorical journey quest, meaning making narrative theme of NDEs, I would go further as a theologian, because only in Theology can leaps of faith make bold claims in the supernatural realm.

When I thought about Fischer's approach, which stresses the wishing and imaginational aspect of afterlives it occurred to me that far from being a secular explanation that debunks their existential reality, it is in agreement with Tibetan attitudes. As I will argue later in this dissertation, if our egotistical desires and identities allow us to project our own co-created afterlife then it can be both real and fulfilling our wishes and cultural expectations. That said, Mormons would likely reject these approaches and argue that the Spirit World is real and exists around us regardless of our input. It is not invented, but is our solid and real home, created by Heavenly Father.

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[130] University of California, "The Trip of an After-lifetime," July 2, 2019, https://www.universityofcalifornia.edu/news/trip-after-lifetime. UC Riverside, "Near-Death Experiences: What We Know About Death, Immortality, and Near-death Experiences," June 12, 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=626UaGNMdMk. Tess Eyrich, "Lectures by John Martin Fischer Explore Near-death Experiences," Inside UCR, April 30, 2019, https://insideucr.ucr.edu/stories/2019/04/30/lectures-john-martin-fischer-explore-near-death-experiences.

[131] John Martin Fischer, and Benjamin Mitchell-Yellin. *Near-Death Experiences: Understanding Visions of the Afterlife* (Oxford University Press, 2016).

[132] Fischer, *Near-Death Experiences.*

Other disciplines are so firmly founded in the current paradigm of reductionist science, that even if scholars want to venture into the invisible and spiritual, there is no room or avenue for them to cross over the academic acceptability boundaries. This leads to many scientists and scholars wearing two hats, one of work and one of faith, representing the separation of the two. Respect is due however even to those scholars who take time to examine these topics. It takes many voices and perspectives to find a way to progress and seek knowledge. A great deal of work went into this project and the outcome reveals the incredible difficulty of making sense of NDEs and the multitude of possible explanations.

There are more nuanced sociological views that admit for the role of culture but still allow room for the reality of the experience. Carol Zaleski, who considers NDEs imaginary, argues that NDEs are ancient and widespread but culturally colored, and she interprets them as a 'conversion' experience where the religious imagination shapes the experience which ends up projecting an imaginary realm. [133] She argues that NDEs tell us stories about ourselves rather than another heavenly world. Gregory Shushan, one of the foremost world experts in the study of NDEs, asserts the universality of NDEs, that is "culture-specific symbols within universal mythemes within universal structures."[134] Again, I argue that even if culture colors our experience and afterlives, it does not necessarily negate their veracity.

Scientific explanations, which assume NDEs are produced by the brain, accept the universality of humans, since they share physiology, and sociology also assumes common human origins at the instinctual level, although explains how local differences manifest in varied

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[133] John J. Collins, and Michael Fishbane, eds., *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys* (State University of New York Press, 1995), 392.

[134] Gregory Shushan, *Conceptions of the Afterlife in Early Civilizations: Universalism, Constructivism, and Near-Death Experience* (Continuum, 2009), 155.

behaviors. In this argument the differences in NDEs would reflect cultural and diversity differences, although the tendency to have an NDE would have a common human origin. How Shushan observes core elements across the spectrum of all religious afterlife descriptions in all eras and places, which he calls a set of common thematic elements, and he argues that these all come from a universal experiential phenomena, the NDE.[135] He says "the culture-specific beliefs and universal experiential phenomena are symbiotic, mutually influencing one another, and playing equally vital roles in the formation of afterlife conceptions."[136] He argues that the spiritual experience precedes conception of doctrines of the afterlife and he adds that "even if the cross-cultural similarities in the ancient texts could be explained by some sort of grand unifying constructivist or cognitive theory, it could not be extended to explain the fact that the same elements are shared with the unsought, spontaneous NDE."[137]

So, applying this to my own data, despite differences in Mormon and Tibetan Delog accounts, they share themes such as being out of body, seeing entities, telepathy, etc. and although humans might independently invent similar visions, the more likely explanation is that these visions actually occurred as described. The Mormons see Joseph Smith, and the Tibetans see Buddhas, but both see spiritual entities familiar to their cultures. I interpret this to mean that there is cultural influence on spiritual visions, but influence is not causation. An independent source causing these visions seems to exist, might I suggest that it is universal consciousness. The experiencer either interprets the vision in their own language and cultural perspective, or the highly intelligent consciousness presents the vision to them in a form that will be understood. Or

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[135] Shushan, *Conceptions of the Afterlife,* 193.
[136] Shushan, *Conceptions of the Afterlife,* 193.
[137] Shushan, *Conceptions of the Afterlife,* 194.

perhaps both is occurring, with the origin of the experience and the experiencer both forming the vision in a dance of co-creation.

Both Shushan and I lean toward the explanation that the similarity in NDEs and themes in afterlife beliefs come from a single experiential reality, and from genuine experiences of an afterlife. Shushan asks if there is a pan-afterlife reality.[138] Obviously, I observe, the afterlife is not the same for everyone, despite similarities. There is the physical and non-physical, the linear and circular journey, the deities or non-personal Absolute, the Mormon and the Tibetan Buddhist. Shushan asks, given human diversity, why should be expected there to be a single afterlife?[139]

Kellehear suggests that there might be several Otherworlds.[140] H.H. Price proposed the theory of a mind-dependent reality in a shared intersubjective afterlife.[141] I think that there is some combination of factors which lead to s all having a personal individualistic experience of anther reality, and that our recollection is filtered through our language and culture, and that the afterlife might be one or multiple realities.

This idea of multiplicity, away from simplicity leads into another perspective suggested by CIIS's Dr. Jorge Ferrer who I think provides a possible solution. Rather than explaining NDEs bottom up from culture he tries to offer a metaphysical top-down explanation. I will explain his ideas in the following section on perennialism, since he rejects both the common core hypothesis, as well as the common cultural hypothesis when he cautions about the difficulties in

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[138] Gregory Shushan, *The Next World: Extraordinary experiences of the Afterlife* (White Crow Books, 2022), 164.

[139] Shushan, *The Next World*,164.

[140] Allan Kellehear, "Culture and the Near-Death Experience: Comments on Keith Augustine's" Psychophysiological and Cultural Correlates Undermining a Survivalist Interpretation of Near-Death Experiences, "*Journal of Near-Death Studies* 26, no. 2 (2007) 151.

[141] Henry Habberley Price, *Thinking and Experience, by H.H. Price* (Hutchinson.1953), 5.11.

looking for cross cultural truth, and he comment that more than one cultural religious tradition can be correct in having insight into "things as they really are".[142] Whilst Buddhist might accept the idea of multiple Otherworld Realities, Mormons would prefer their own cosmology in which there is a place for all humans in the one system.

Shushan comments on the relationship of culture on NDEs saying that, "The occurrence of NDEs is not due to expectation and prior religious beliefs, otherwise they would not happen to atheists and young children. It is clear we're not creating the experience, but our cultural backgrounds and our individuality act as filters for it. Even as we're experiencing it, our minds help to give it form and structure through the symbols and metaphors that help us to make sense of our reality. In other worlds we're co-creating the experience, together with whatever causes NDEs in the first place"[143] He argues that experience precedes conception. I agree with him that the order of events is that there is some 'otherworld' that is experienced, before conceptualization and sharing the experience via language. If cultures differ how then to explain the similarities of the elements of the experiences cross culturally? Are they independently invented and agreement in visions occurs from a coincidence? Is it not more likely that an independent realm is experienced and then translated into a testimony using the language and culture of the experiencer? This I agree with Shushan on the active co-creative role of the NDEr and the interaction between experiencer with the experienced.

Psychology, Carl Gustav Jung and Stanislav Grof

Carl Jung valued spiritual experiences and not only was interested in religions but also in a wide spectrum of spirituality, including dreams, alchemy, and self-development on spiritual

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[142] Jorge N. Ferrer, and Jacob H. Sherman, *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism* (State University of New York Press, 2008). 154-155

[143] DJ Kadagian, *The Crossover Experience* (Four Seasons Productions, 2022),46-47.

paths. Jung contributed a great deal to our modern understanding of the self and death.[144] He is renowned for his analysis of the ideas in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* but treats them only in a metaphorical level and takes them out of their cultural context.[145] He butchered the original meaning by twisting it and the Bardos to fit his preconceived levels of psychological levels of development. [146]The depths of his own inner vision of his own images coming from his unconscious mind which he says flooded him like a stream can be found in his "Red Book".[147] Jung studied the individual subconscious, and he then developed the theory of the human collective unconscious.

Taking Jung's idea, I would venture further and widen the scope to claim that the collective unconscious is part of the cosmic universal non-local consciousness. Humankinds' 'collective subconscious' is only a sliver of the 'cosmic collective subconsciousness,' the larger subconsciousness is actually aware of itself and able to access this repository of everything that has ever existed or been thought or acted out. I rename this the Universal Cosmic Consciousness, and it includes not just human but also animal and possibly the collective unconscious of all entities that might possibly live in the universes. In my interpretation it is not an inert repository of human subconscious input but a vibrant realm with aliveness and intelligence of its own.

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[144] C. G. Jung, and Jenny L. Yates, *Jung on Death and Immortality* (Princeton University Press, 1999).

[145] See his commentary at the beginning of the 3rd edition of Evans-Wentz's translation: Karma-gliṅ-pa. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Or, the After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane, According to LāMa Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering.* Edited by W. Y. Evans-Wentz. Translated by Zla-ba-bsam-'grub. Third edition. (Oxford University Press, 1957), xxxv. Donald S. Lopez Jr, *Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), 58-59.

[146] This is akin to early Protestants approaching the Hebrew Bible and reading a Protestant theology into it and making verses fit into an alien perspective to the original intent.

[147] Carl G. Jung, *The Red Book: A Reader's Edition* (WW Norton & Company, 2012).

I suggest that NDEs occur where the realm of the cultural unconscious merges with the cosmic universal consciousness. There is a connection between aspects of roles of the main twelve archetypes identified by Jung and their corresponding emotions and tendencies can be identified in the afterlife realms also. e.g., explorer, lover, or sage. The NDE and VTE elements also reflect these archetypes, which are adjusted and more comprehensive in scope than in Jung's list. As for a person's identity, in NDEs is expands in the experience so that it includes but is more than our Earth identity which is limited.

The life review reveals the shadow self, and the darker side, as well as the revelation of the true self hidden by the persona on Earth. Also, just as the collective human unconscious collects and adds to individuals' storehouse memories but life review taps into the stored memories at a cosmic level and interconnects them with all other memories as if the universe if a giant recorder of events, intentions and emotions from multiple perspectives. NDEs tend to shift the ordinary self-perception of one's identity so that not only is truth known externally but internally, as a type of self-revelation. Just as the self represents the union of conscious and unconscious aspects of us, in an NDE there is a blending of 'self' with the 'selves' of others, so that base ego is transcended, and boundaries between selves are diminished. As a result, empathy and love expand in the spirit world. Interestingly Tibetan Buddhism also states that the part of the ego that is an illusion is transcended in the Bardos, and that while the mind stream continues it realizes its 'real nature.'

Stanislav Grof, another esteemed and brilliant psychologist wrote a great deal about Jung and brings more insight into my own ideas. Grof writes "Archetypes are timeless primordial principles underlying, forming, and informing the fabric of the material world. The tendency to interpret the world in terms of archetypal principles first emerged in ancient Greece and was one

of the most striking characteristics of Greek philosophy and culture.[148] In the philosophy of Plato, they were described as pure metaphysical principles-transcendent Ideas, Forms, or divine *archai.* Grof says that "Archetypes are timeless essences, cosmic ordering principles which can also manifest as mythic personifications, or specific deities of various cultures. They express themselves through the individual psyche and its deeper processes, but they do not originate in the human mind and are not its products."[149]

I interpret the eighty elements as archetypes. This is extremely profound and suggests to me that the source of so much that fills our Earthly minds, and even our NDEs, comes from something greater, perhaps universal consciousness? Grof clarifies this position: "Jungians refer to the world of the archetypal figures and realms as "imaginal" to distinguish it from imaginary products of the individual human mind. Although it can be accessed through intrapsychic self-exploration, the imaginal world has objective existence, and those who experience it can reach consensual agreement on its various aspects… According to Jung's later work, archetypes are "psychoid" in nature; they operate in the twilight zone between consciousness and matter." [150] This means that perhaps heaven, hell, or the Bardo might have objective existence in the imaginal, as opposed to the imaginary.

Later in this chapter I will continue to discuss consciousness which I believe is the key tying all these theories together. Is it possible that some of Jung's later insights came from knowledge gained during his own NDE? According to his autobiography, written when he was nearing death at age 81, in 1944 when Jung was 68, he broke his foot and then had a heart attack after which he had visionary experiences. He was above the planet Earth looking down at the

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[148] Grof. *Ultimate Journey,* 44.
[149] Grof. *Ultimate Journey,* 42-44.
[150] Grof. *Ultimate Journey,* 44.

oceans and continents. He was able to distinguish geographical locations in all their beauty. After floating in space, he reached a stone Temple also floating in space with burning oil lamps inside.[151]

Michael Gross

Michael Gross employed a Jungian approach to try to explain NDEs and he proposed that some element of personality survives death.[152] He notes (a) the consistency and universality which they generally display, (b) their paranormal (psi) aspects, and (c) their power to modify attitudes and behavior.[153] He challenged scientific orthodoxy that humans are just finite biological organisms that cease upon death. His explanation posits that there is a Jungian archetype of Death in operation and that in the NDE individuation decreases and is superseded by entry into the 'mind of mankind' which is outside of space and time.[154]In other words the NDE taps into the collective dying experience of humankind. This theory explains both the numinous aspects to NDEs and their consistency across eras and cultures. However, like many survival theories it is unverifiable.[155] I tend to agree with Gross. He provides an explanation that accepts the supernatural claims but frames it in non-religious terms.

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[151] Grof, *The Human Encounter,* 139. Jung, Carl G. *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*. Vol. 268. Vintage, 1989.

[152] Grosso, Michael. "Toward an Explanation of Near-Death Phenomena." *Anabiosis: The Journal of Near-Death Studies* (1981):150-158.

[153] Grosso, Toward an Explanation, 4.

[154] Grosso, Toward an Explanation, 20.

[155] For another analysis see Johanna Sopanen, "Unconscious: Carl Jung's Liber Novus and the Psychedelic Experience." *Philosophy and Psychedelics* (2014): 237.

Bruce Greyson

Bruce Greyson is a professor of psychiatry and neurobehavioral sciences at the University of Virginia. He has spent the past 50 years of his career studying NDEs and is one of the most prolific writers and vocal defenders of the authenticity of the experience. His research has delved into reports originating in the 19th century to modern times.[156] Importantly NDErs are psychologically healthy, and their experiences cannot be reduced to any pathology, not can current neuroscience provide a concrete explanation. He has identified elements, trends, stages (cognitive, affective, paranormal, and transcendental) and suggested theories, explaining that there is no one single model to explain them. [157]He states, "The paradoxical occurrence of heightened, lucid awareness and logical thought processes during a period of impaired cerebral perfusion raises particularly perplexing questions for our current understanding of consciousness and its relation to brain function."[158] Greyson, like his colleagues Fenwick and others, dispute suggestions that all NDEs can be dismissed as hallucinations or the result of brain chemistry. Greyson devised the Greyson scale to measure NDEs in 1999. [159] There are various other scales, which replicate the main elements and their depth, such as Hampe's but Greyson's is the

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[156] Janice Miner Holden, and Bruce Greyson, *The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation* (Praeger Publishers, 2009). Bruce Greyson, *After: A Doctor Explores What Near-Death Experiences Reveal About Life and Beyond* (St. Martin's Essentials, an imprint of St. Martin's Publishing Group, 2021). Edward F. Kelly, et al., *Irreducible Mind: Toward a Psychology for the 21st Century* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2010).

[157] Bruce Greyson, "Commentary on 'Psychophysiological and Cultural Correlates Undermining a Survivalist Interpretation of Near-Death Experiences." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 26, no. 2 (2007): 127-145.

[158] Bruce Greyson, "Incidence and Correlates of Near-Death Experiences in a Cardiac Care Unit." *General hospital psychiatry* 25, no. 4 (2003): 269-276. p.275 Greyson, Bruce. "The Psychodynamics of Near-Death experiences." *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 171, no. 6 (1983): 376-381.

[159] Bruce Greyson, "The Near-Death Experience Scale: Construction, Reliability, and Validity." *The Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease* 171, no. 6 (1983): 369-375. Charles Swedrock, "Greyson NDE Scale," June 11, 2022, https://iands.org/research/nde-research/important-research-articles/698-greyson-nde-scale.html. Charlotte Martial, Jessica Simon, Ninon Puttaert, et al. "The Near-Death Experience Content (NDE-C) Scale: Development And Psychometric Validation." *Consciousness and Cognition* 86 (2020).

preferred.[160] What he excels at are refuting scientific objection while demonstrating the consistency of NDEs over time. [161]

He also takes a wider view of the topic and considers the cultural aspects of NDEs. Like myself, he identifies both culture specific and universal aspects to the experiences. He says, "Although cultural expectations and parameters of the brush with death influence the content of some NDEs, near-death phenomenology is invariant across cultures. That invariance may reflect universal psychological defenses, neurophysiological processes, or actual experience of a transcendent or mystical domain."[162] Greyson has met with the Dalai Lama XIV and discussed spiritual experiences, and this led him to author a book incorporating Buddhist views with David E. Presti.

This he is like me, one of many appreciating the fresh perspectives offered by Eastern understandings of the mind, and ways of thinking not constricted by Western tunnel vision.[163] Like myself he rejects reductive materialism, and he proposes a different view of reality. When he discussed his ideas and NDE research with Tibetan Buddhists in Dharamsala India, he had a different reaction to his lecture than he gets in the West. The monks were already familiar with his ideas. However, they wondered why science was studying NDEs, rather than co-existing with this natural process using the phenomena to reduce suffering in the world.[164]

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[160] Johann Christoph Hampe, *Sterben Ist Doch Ganz Anders: Erfahrungen mit dem eigenen Tod* (Kreuz-Verlag, 1975).

[161] Bruce, Greyson, "Consistency of Near-Death Experience Accounts Over Two Decades: Are Reports Embellished Over Time?" *Resuscitation* 73, no. 3 (2007): 407-411.

[162] Bruce Greyson. "Western Scientific Approaches to Near-Death Experiences." *Humanities* 4, no. 4 (2015): 775–96. Abstract.

[163] David E. Presti, Bruce Greyson, Edward F. Kelly, et al. *Mind Beyond Brain Buddhism, Science, and the Paranormal*. (Columbia University Press, 2021).

[164] Greyson, *After,* 221-222.

Steve Taylor

Obviously, there is psychologist in both camps trying to explain NDEs. Psychiatry and psychology often treat visions as a pathology and reaches for the DSM for a cause.[165] One British voice is Steve Taylor, author of several bestsellers on what he calls 'awakening experiences'.[166] His general thesis throughout his works is that the cause or trigger for 'awakening experiences' which includes, NDEs, is turmoil, and psychological turmoil. This fits in with the knowledge that NDEs are cause by both physical and mental trauma, even intense fear of death in moments of danger. His works also have links to Buddhism in that he is part of the modern mindfulness movement. Often New Age and New Religious Movements are enriched by Eastern spirituality. Taylor says that these awakening experiences cannot be dismissed as self-delusion or a psychological defense mechanism, but it is the dissolution of ego

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[165] American Psychiatric Association, D.S.M. T.F., and American Psychiatric Association. *Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders: DSM-5*. Vol. 5, no. 5. Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2013.

[166] Steve Taylor is a senior lecturer in psychology at Leeds Beckett University a past chair of the Transpersonal Psychology Section of the British Psychological Society. He publishes articles on his website:

Taylor, Steve. "Spontaneous Awakening Experiences: Beyond Religion and Spiritual Practice." *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 44, no. 1 (2012). Steve Taylor, "Spontaneous Awakening Experiences: Beyond Religion and Spiritual Practice – Steve Taylor," December 16, 2018, https://www.stevenmtaylor.com/academic-articles/spontanous-awakening-experiences-beyond-religion-spiritual-practice/. "The Return of Perennial Perspectives? Why Transpersonal Psychology Should Remain Open to Essentialism – Steve Taylor," Steve Taylor, December 16, 2018, https://www.stevenmtaylor.com/academic-articles/the-return-of-perennial-perspectives-why-transpersonal-psychology-should-remain-open-to-essentialism/. "From Philosophy to Phenomenology: The Argument for a 'Soft' Perennialism – Steve Taylor," Steve Taylor, December 16, 2018, https://www.stevenmtaylor.com/academic-articles/philosophy-phenomenology-argument-soft-perennialism/.

Steve Taylor, "Mortality and Mindfulness: How Intense Encounters with Death Can Generate Spontaneous Mindfulness." In *Mindfulness in Positive Psychology*, edited by Itai Ivtzan, (Routledge, 2016) 126-140. Steve Taylor, "Mortality and Mindfulness: How Intense Encounters With Death Can Generate Spontaneous Mindfulness – Steve Taylor," Steve Taylor, December 16, 2018, https://www.stevenmtaylor.com/academic-articles/mortality-mindfulness-intense-encounters-death-can-generate-spontaneous-mindfulness/.

Steve Taylor, *The Leap: The Psychology of Spiritual Awakening* (New World Library, 2017). Steve Taylor, *Spiritual Science: Why Science Needs Spirituality to Make Sense of The World* (Watkins Media Limited, 2018). Steve Taylor, *Waking from Sleep: Why Awakening Experiences Occur And How To Make Them Permanent* (Hay House, Inc, 2010). Steve Taylor, *The Clear Light: Spiritual Reflections and Meditations* (New World Library, 2020). Steve Taylor, and Eckhart Tolle. *The Adventure: A Practical Guide to Spiritual Awakening* (New World Library, 2024).

attachment in moments of turmoil that provokes them. He remarks that the most significant aspect of NDEs is their positive aftereffects, which are a marked decrease in interest in work and money and an increased interest in nature and compassion in relationships with others.[167] Pim van Lommel shares this view saying: "The long lasting transformational effects of an experience that lasts only for a few minutes was a surprising and unexpected finding."[168] Taylor identifies death as the modern taboo, replacing the shame of sex in Victorian times, and far from the earlier reminder of 'momento mori' held by our ancestors.[169]

While Mormon VTEs are 'awakening experiences' that occur in a religious framework, Taylor explains that many such experiences occur to people with no religious framework. This is important to note, that the NDE or vision can occur regardless of one's faith status. Faith only comes into play in the interpretation of the experience later, and possibly faith can interact to shape the experience much as our own personalities shape our dreams. After looking at my research there are numerous ways to look at NDEs. One is to say it is a person visiting a realm in another dimension. However, I cannot dismiss the strong links to one's personal psychology and belief system and the role this plays in the whole experience. While this connection is not understood it is important to state its existence.

Taylor is aware of this and discusses awakening experiences in a cross-cultural aspect.[170] He notes that "There is nothing abnormal about awakening experiences. They are completely natural…They may be interpreted in religious terms, and certain …spiritual paths may make

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[167] Steve Taylor, "Mortality and Mindfulness: How Intense Encounters With Death Can Generate Spontaneous Mindfulness – Steve Taylor," December 16, 2018, https://www.stevenmtaylor.com/academic-articles/mortality-mindfulness-intense-encounters-death-can-generate-spontaneous-mindfulness/.

[168] Van Lommel, Pim. "About the Continuity of our Consciousness." *Brain Death and Disorders of Consciousness* (2004): 115-132. 118.

[169] Taylor, Mortality and Mindfulness.

[170] Taylor, Steve. "Spontaneous Awakening Experiences: Beyond Religion and Spiritual Practice." *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 44, no. 1 (2012). 75.

their occurrence more likely...however (they) have a psychological origin and can be explained in psychological-energetic terms."[171] He prefers to study this area in a non-religious setting, believing that the association of awaking experiences with religions has limited serious study into them.[172]

Craig D. Murray

Craig D. Murray's psychological scientific approach to understanding OBEs and NDEs is exemplary. He curates the latest expert opinions on this topic in the multi-authored chapter book *Psychological Scientific Perspectives on Out of Body and Near-Death Experiences*. This book tries to make meaning out of the phenomenology and similar cultural motifs of these experiences and explores various paradigms, even including Japanese perspectives.[173] Despite the abstract explanations, Murray, in the concluding chapter, emphasizes that very personal and impactful aftereffects of NDEs, as experiences that are not just lived experiences, but cause a major life transition and spiritual growth, and their personal biographical context. I agree with him that while science and Quantum Physics seem to ordinary people to be remote and mindboggling blackboard equations with certain implications about reality, NDEs are the lived realities of these implications.

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[171] Taylor, Spontaneous Awakening, 88.
[172] Taylor, Spontaneous Awakening, 89.
[173] Craig D. Murray, *Psychological Scientific Perspectives on Out-Of-Body and Near-Death Experiences* (Nova Science Publishers, 2009).

(iii) Supernatural and Western Religious Explanations: Non-Theistic and Theistic Metaphysical and Philosophical Explanations

Shamanism

Shamanism is one of the earliest supernatural explanations for NDEs. Grof notes that "Shamanism is closely related to death and dying. shamans typically experience a journey into the Underworld, the realm of the dead."[174] After the experience of death, dismemberment, and total annihilation, the shaman experiences rebirth. Like Shamanism, communication with invisible forces and deities and shamanic journeying, often with the use of psychedelics or meditative states, are trying to reclaim an older form of religion.[175] "Mircea Eliade suggests that some ideas about life after death may have originated in Shamanistic trances which characteristically include a notion of the Shaman leaving his body.[176]

Eliade Wrote a book on death and the afterlife. This book is a series of excerpts with minimal analysis, of ancient texts on death from Babylonian, Egyptian, Vedic, Zoroastrian, Greek, American First Nations, and Muslim sources. Even though the cook has no commentary it does demonstrate the importance of immortality to our ancestors. I do not think we are any less interested today. [177] His analysis of death appeared in a second book The Sacred and the Profane, which characterized death as a rite of passage.[178] He commented that *religious man* [179] does not

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[174] Grof, *Ultimate Journey*, 30.

[175] See Rupert Sheldrake, Terence McKenna, and Ralph Abraham, *Chaos, Creativity, and Cosmic Consciousness* (Simon and Schuster, 2001), 119.

[176] Paul Badham, Religious and Near-Death Experience in Relation to Belief in a Future Life. *Mortality*, (1997): 2:1, 4.

[177] Mircea Eliade, *Death, Afterlife, and Eschatology: A Thematic Source Book of the History of Religions.* (HarperCollins Publishers, 1974).

[178] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane: The Nature of Religion*. (Hardcourt Inc.,1959).

[179] The reference to 'man' is old fashioned and I only quote how this term was used. The modern rendition would be gender neutral such as persons or human.

see death as the end of life. Death is but another modality of human existence. He discusses the importance of ideas of birth, death and then regeneration/rebirth. Human life as a pre and post existence and these are known to exist. Life comes from somewhere not of this world and then departs here and goes to the beyond.[180] He sees the cosmos is a living organism and the human subconscious mind as having a connection with the transcendental.[181] Eliade referred to shamanism as the "archaic technique of ecstasy" in the sense of its original Greek meaning-stepping out of oneself (ek-stasis). The visionary journeys of the shamans are not always blissful and joyful; they often are dark and agonizing."[182] Eliade's ideas contrasting the sacred and profane provide a viewpoint through which to understand NDEs, either as sacred or profane experiences. Eliade's contribution to academia was his voice allowing the supernatural and sacred to have a legitimate position instead of being relegated to the genre of fairy tales and imagination. Eliade's position provides a helpful way to understand NDEs. However, his critics would argue that his work is speculative and place a greater value on what it reveals about human society rather than the mystical realms. Even if his writings on death are impressive, they are not considered proof of an afterlife.

Social anthropologist Michael Harner (1929-2018) even tried to replicate the shamanic experience using psychedelics as a door to enter these realms. (rather than NDE door)[183] He insisted that the heavens and spirit actually exist, that there are many other worlds organized into three spheres: lower middle and upper. They exist outside of time in a non-ordinary reality and

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[180] Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 147-8.
[181] Eliade, *Sacred and Profane*, 148,210.
[182] Grof, *Ultimate Journey*, 33.
[183] Michael J. Harner, Jeffrey Mishlove, and Arthur Bloch, *The Way of the Shaman* (Harper & Row, 1990). Michael J. Harner, *Cave and Cosmos: Shamanic Encounters with Another Reality* (North Atlantic Books, 2013). Michael J. Harner, *Hallucinogens and Shamanism* (Oxford U. Press, 1973).

shamans have out of body experiences there.[184] Harner said "This is the same realm of divine union and love described by near-death survivors." [185]I noted that core elements of shamanic experiences correspond with NDE elements e.g., going through rotating tunnels towards a light, travel through the stars, beautiful buildings.[186] Harner's position is self-evident to me, however his mystical views would not be taken seriously by naturalists or agnostics.

Christian explanations

The medieval Christian world was one where the afterlife was prominent in everyday life and where religiosity was the norm. Art expresses many of the conceptions of heaven and hell at this time. The Abrahamic traditions, especially Kabbalah and Sufism, and Christian mysticism had deeply rooted beliefs about an afterlife and judgment.[187] The reformation wrought many changes in the cosmology, theology and order of the earth and heavens.

One of the most influential mystics who shaped much of the modern view of heaven was Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772) son of a Swedish Lutheran bishop. His ideas even circulated in North America in the 19th century at the time Joseph Smith Jr. was founding the Church. Despite similarities between Swedenborgianism and Mormonism, diffusion of ideas has been discounted. The parallels with LDS doctrine in D&C 78 are apparent and indeed Sidney Rigdon was familiar with Swedenborgian ideas, however it seems that the similarity is that both traditions came from a similar base in the New Testament.[188] No study of NDEs would be

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[184] Harner, *Cave and Cosmos,* 254.
[185] Harner, *Cave and Cosmos,*254.
[186] Harner, *Cave and Cosmos,* 123.
[187] John J. Collins, and Michael Fishbane, eds., *Death, Ecstasy, and Other Worldly Journeys* (State University of New York Press, 1995).
[188] 1 Corinthians 15:40–42.

complete without a mention of Swedenborg and it could be argued that he is one of the earliest documented psychonauts whose inspiration came from his own mystical journeys into the Otherworlds. Diana Walsh Pasulka has studied Swedenborg's claims of angels assisting him to visit Mercury, Mars, Venus, and the moon, which resulted in his book *Life on Other Planets* (1758).[189] In Heaven and Hell first published in 1758 in Latin, Swedenborg tackles a multitude of heavenly aspects inducing: Three heavens, the heavens made up of countless communities, angels, correspondences between everything in heaven and in Man, regions of heaven time in heaven, children and marriages in heaven, joy and happiness.[190] It sounds similar to descriptions given in NDEs. He describes spirits and how human spirits exist in perfect and youthful form in heaven,[191] the idea that people chose hell rather than heaven for themselves, which is in accordance with NDE claims. Swedenborg claims to have discussed all these things with angels and his references to telepathic communication is uncanny. "Everyone in heaven speaks from his thought, for they have thought speech there" [192] His heaven is full of love, love of the Lord and love of neighbors. As for the regions there is the celestial kingdom, then an intermediate region. There are spiritual and natural parts. Marriages continue in heaven,[193] nor is there time and space.[194] Man's state after death is described: "There are three states a person passes thought after his death…the first state involves his more outward aspects, the second involves his more inward, and the third is a state of preparation."[195] Some bypass this, such as those prepared for

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[189] Diana W. Pasulka, *American Cosmic: Ufos, Religion, Technology* (Oxford University Press, Incorporated, 2019).

[190] Emanuel Swedenborg, and George F Dole. *Heaven and Hell*, Rev. Dole translationed (Swedenborg Foundation, 1994).

[191] Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 397.

[192] Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 28.

[193] Emanuel Swedenborg, *Conjugial Love and its Chaste Delights: Also, Adulterous Love and its Sinful Pleasures (*New York: American Swedenborg Printing and Publishing Society, 1871).

[194] Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*. Chapters. 18, 22.

[195] Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 398.

heaven upon the Earth. When people go to heaven, they meet family and friends.[196] Swedenborg encourages people to live a heaven bound life and not to embrace an evil path to hell.[197] Again in the Christian tradition the work of Rudolf Otto provides a way to express the emotional feelings of the NDEr as many of the elements correspond with descriptions of the 'numinous'.[198] If anything, NDEs exemplify the *mysterium trememdum* which describes the experiencer in a state which can be described as *fascinans*. NDEs and their source cannot be defined, just as the numinous cannot be reduced or defined because it is *sui generis* (unique and in its own class).

Another mystic whose ideas might explain NDEs is the Orthodox monk, Seraphim Rose. (1934-1982) who wrote copiously about the afterlife.[199] He wrote this book in reply to Raymond Moody's ideas, both recognizing that Moody was correct in the elements of NDEs he pointed out but saying that the Orthodox church had already known of these elements. Moody was no innovator then, but merely repeating the precise doctrines of the Holy Fathers, unbeknownst to him. Rose says OBEs had been documented and approved of by Archbishops.[200] The saints appear to the dying, as well as apparitions of relatives and friends.[201] He also expounds the doctrines of angels and beings of light.[202] He even confirms the authenticity of Swedenborg, saying that he was indeed in contact with unseen realities.[203] Also Rose mentions *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, referenced by Moody in his book, and Rose says the some

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[196] Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 400.
[197] Swedenborg, *Heaven and Hell*, 433.
[198] Rudolf Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry Into The Non-Rational Factor in The Idea of the Divine and its Relation to the Rational* (Oxford University Press, 1926).
[199] Seraphim Rose, *The Soul After Death: Contemporary After-Death Experiences in the Light of the Orthodox Teaching on the Afterlife.* (Saint Herman of Alaska Brotherhood, 1993).
[200] Rose, Soul after Death, 7. St. Gregory the Great in his Dialogues (Dialogues IV 36.12.13-18), https://www.tertullian.org/fathers/gregory_04_dialogues_book4.htm#C4.
[201] Rose, Soul after Death, 19.
[202] Rose, *Soul after Death*, 21.
[203] Rose, *Soul after Death*, 94.

Tibetan experiences tally with the orthodox. First there is an OBE, and then the Tibetan 'Clear Light' is like the Orthodox 'Being of Light,' encountered at the time of death.[204] He discounts the other visions seen in the *Bardo,* however. However, Rose cautions making further comparisons because the Devil can mislead and trick the living, and often the messages received from psychics are from fallen spirits.[205] The heavens are made of a subtle and ethereal matter but in many respects the relationship between spirits is similar to on Earth.[206] Rose did not accept the 'heaven' of NDErs as a final destination but said it was one of several 'toll houses' found in the transitory realms on the journey to heaven. He taught that people should not read about NDEs in case the descriptions led then astray, and to keep to church teachings instead.

The origins of Christianity, and its faith as expressed in the traditional Creeds contain supernatural claims such as the virgin birth, the miracles of Jesus, the Transfiguration, and the Resurrection. In Roman Catholicism visions of the Virgin Mary and the miracles of the Saints are attested. St, Paul is supposed to have had a life changing vision and also an Out of the Body Experience and heavenly visions:

> I come now to visions and revelations granted by the Lord. I know a Christian man who fourteen years ago (whether in the body or out of the body I don't know – God knows) was caught up as far as the third heaven. And I know that this same man, (whether in the body or apart from the body I don't know – God knows) was caught up into paradise and heard words so secret that human lips may not repeat them. About such a man I am ready to boast. (2 Corinthians 12:1-5)

According to Paul Badham St. Paul argued that his authority rested on his personal experiences rather than tradition. [207] Might NDEs be the ground of authority? They certainly lead

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[204] Rose, *Soul after Death*, 91.
[205] Rose, *Soul after Death*, 91.
[206] Rose, *Soul after Death*, 269.
[207] Paul Badham, Religious and Near-Death Experience in Relation to Belief in a Future Life. *Mortality*, (1997): 2:1.

to faith and belief.[208] As a baseline the church of England teaches the traditional doctrine of the afterlife, and whilst admitting that a hell exists, chooses to focus on heaven and the compassion of God. Modern Anglicanism tends to play down the Judgement and mellows ideas of hell as a metaphor for self-imposed exile from a chosen rejection of God. The resurrection of Jesus Christ and his atonement for sins, is given as the hope for all God's children to be saved. In *The Book of Common Prayer* 1662, under the chapter *Order for The Burial of the Dead*, theology is based on 1 Corinthians 15:20 from the New Testament. God is said to have 'taken the soul' with the proclamation that through the resurrection to eternal life, Jesus can at the end times change this vile body to a glorious body like His own.[209]

Many nominal Christians, even those who recite the Creeds, often fail to recognize that the traditional teaching is for the eventual resurrection of a physical like body, and that heaven is not some ethereal mental state. While it is mentioned that the souls go to God, the fine details are omitted here and rarely discussed in my own personal experience, in a lay setting. Thus, many mainline Christians believe in some sort of heaven that is vague, and often filled in with Hollywood images and tropes. At the heart of Christianity is the idea of a personal relationship and communication with "the other side," the divine, and the angelic in some heavenly realm. [210]

Christian denominations have varied about who gets to have an afterlife. Generally, there are similar versions of heaven, hell, and purgatory. The main debate in Christianity was about

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[208] Diana Walsh Pasulka, "From Purgatory to the UFO Phenomenon: The Catholic Supernatural Goes Galactic." *Religion: Super Religion* (2017): 375-387. Also see her chapter in Christopher M. Moreman ed., *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying* (Routledge, 2018).

[209] The 1662 Book of Common Prayer in PDF as printed by John Baskerville in 1762. Rights vested in the Crown of England. The Church of England. "At The Burial of the Dead | the Church of England, printed by John Baskerville, 1762, https://www.churchofengland.org/prayer-and-worship/worship-texts-and-resources/book-common-prayer/burial-dead.

[210] Robert A. Orsi, *Between Heaven and Earth: The Religious Worlds People Make and the Scholars Who Study Them* (Princeton University Press, 2004).

who gets to go to heaven, and whether it is determined by grave, by predestination, or by good works. The is the problem of how a loving God would choose to send the majority to his children to hell, given that the majority of human beings either are unaware that Christianity, exists, belong to other religions, are atheist, or were born before the birth of Jesus. Some modern Anglicans for example argue that hell is only a metaphor and that it is self-imposed exile from living in God's presence. Evangelicals might argue one must be born again and follow their churches to be saved. Some Catholics ague for conditional immorality. There are universalists who say also good people will be saved, despite their professed beliefs.

Mormons believe every human has a chance at salvation either here or in the afterlife. Not all Christians understand the actual scriptural claims on which their faith is based. Robert Wild argues that the idea of immortality actually came from Platonic and Greek ideas. Then he adds that scripture originally does not contain the idea of eternal punishment in hell, but rather that the unrepentant will be annihilated. Once the church accepted the idea of an immortal soul, then the idea of eternal hell punishment developed. Subsequently afterlife doctrines were further developed by Augustine.[211] Eschatology then evolved and split at the Reformation into Protestant and Roman Catholic positions. Mormon Theology is faithful to the original Greek ideas of immortality of the soul before birth and after death.

Islam

Islam has a rich tradition of the afterlife, and the stark difference between heaven and hell is outlined in the Qur'an. The Sufi mystics often had very profound realizations that countered the typical dualism between God and Human. E.g. Hussain bin Mansoor al-Hallaj who was

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[211] Robert Wild, *A Catholic Reading Guide to Conditional Immortality: The Third Alternative to Hell and Universalism* (Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2016), 3.

executed for blasphemy after announcing his non-dualistic unitive phrase Ana Al Haqq (Arabic: أنا الحَقيقة I am the truth, a name of Allah). The Sufi poet Jalal al-Din Muhammad Rumi seemed to understand our life and death situation in Earth when he wrote the poem *The Dream that must be interpreted*: "This place is a dream. Only a sleeper considers it real. Then death comes like dawn, and you wake up laughing at what you thought was your grief."[212] This is the feeling many NDErs have when they awaken on the other side of death in the Spirit World. The theistic and non-theistic supernatural claims suggest 'survival hypotheses' of varying types. Henry Price suggests while arguing for the truth or falsity of these hypotheses to keep an open mind given the huge volume of reports and research in this area.[213] John Hick, one of the greatest modern theologians defended the theistic view of survival. He argues that scientific and philosophical objections to the idea of survival after death can be challenged, and he claims that human inadequacy in facing suffering supports the basic religious argument for immortality.[214]

It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to explain all the complex and nuanced depictions of heaven and hell described in all the world religions and that is why the main comparative aspect in this paper is between Mormonism and Tibetan Buddhism. Nevertheless, belief in an afterlife and stories of those who have seen the other side have been reported and accepted for centuries. As institutional religions decline, evolving forms of spirituality continue the tradition of belief in the afterlife.

The claims and position of these religious views mentioned above are accepted by their followers but the gulf between religion and secular society and science are solid. The latter

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[212] Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī. *The Essential Rumi*, Translated by Coleman Barks, Reynold Alleyne Nicholson, A. J. Arberry, and John Moyne (HarperOne, 2004), 112.

[213] Henry Habberley Price, "Survival and the Idea of 'Another World'." In *Brain and Mind*, 1-33. (Routledge, 2014).

[214] John Hick, *Death and Eternal Life*. (John Knox Press, 1994).

tolerate religious views but pay no credence to them. Critics of the religious views would say they are erroneous views, but perhaps have a positive function in bolstering mental health in a violent world.

New Religions

Theosophy, Spiritualism, the New Age, all describe the heavenly realms and psychics claim to communicate with spirits on the other side. This type of individualistic spirituality is often decentralized, non-institutional and often fluid with no set definite beliefs, except a vague acceptance of the idea of a spirit world, with which communication is possible, and an emphasis on psi phenomena, angelic visits, guides and ascended masters, personal growth and blended interpretations of karma and reincarnation or heavenly realms.

Diana Pasulka, a scholar who has examined Roman Catholic Mysticism is now studying the parallels between extraterrestrial and 'alien' encounters with spiritual mysticism. There are suggestions that 'aliens' might' be more than biologics from other physical planets, but more akin to a spiritual entity that can traverse different dimensions.[215] Even Swedenborg claimed to have visited other planets with his 'angel'. He claimed to have spoken to beings on those planets and he published his experiences in a book, *Life on Other Planets* (1758). [216] Pasulka explains why religious studies a tool is to study reports of mystical experiences non- judgmentally. Jacques Vallee also recognized similar patterns in his in his book Passport to Magonia.[217] French bishop Agobard of Lyon (815CE) wrote a treatise against the belief in a cloud realm called

[215] Pasulka, *American Cosmic.*

[216] Pasulka, *American Cosmic,* xi. Swedenborg, Emanuel, George F Dole, and Jonathan S. Rose. *Other Planets* (Swedenborg Foundation, 2018).

[217] Jacques Vallee, *Passport to Magonia: From Folklore to Flying Saucers* (*Daily Grail Publishing*, 2014).

Magonia, from whence ships floated in the sky, sailed by sailors who had been lost in storms.[218] In India the gods, such as Rama and Ravana traveled the skies in *vimanahs*.

Modern spirituality offers a variety of ways of looking at and trying to explain strange phenomena; from seeing flying vehicles, meeting strange entities and coming out of body. Alien abduction reports appear to have elements similar to some NDEs. I can see the parallels but also the multiple rabbit holes in trying to make sense of all these stories. These beliefs trickle through popular culture and whether these are literally true, or just experienced to be true, there does seem to be a layer of interpretation and Pasulka wisely would prefer not to assess the truth claims or argue for its justification.[219] There is the experiencer's belief, there is the interpretation and there is the reality, and it is very hard to separate these. My instinct is to consider that in strange anomalous experiences it is not a question of an individual, out of context, being presented with a strange event, but rather levels of interaction, communication, reaction, interpretation and even co -creation betwixt the two. I would also differentiate between external psi events and internal experiences such as OBEs in which the inner human dimension of mind is explored. This can be through suggested training methods or through ingestion of psychedelics.

Spiritualism

Spiritual mediumship whilst popular for over a century is based on a belief in survival after death and communication with the deceased. The Scole Experiment which consisted of sessions held in England between 1993-8 under the auspices of the SPR are an example of

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[218] Agobard de Lyons. De Grandine et Tonitruis. ca. 816 CE (On Hail and Thunder), https://www.academia.edu/43589534/Agobard_of_Lyons_De_grandine_et_tonitruis_ca_816_trans_by_W_J_Lewis. Michael D. Bailey, "Magic and Disbelief in Carolingian Lyon." In Civilizations of the Supernatural. Witchcraft, Ritual, and Religious Experience in Late Antique, Medieval, and Renaissance Traditions, (Trivent Publishing, 2020), 177-202.

[219] Pasulka, *American Cosmic,* 9.

modern attempts to contact the spirit world via trance mediumship and communicate with the deceased.[220] Similar sessions have been attempted by various mediums in the United States. [221] Modern video and sound recording devices are used to try to capture psi phenomena. The goal was to prove survival after death by measuring evidence of communication. The experimenters claimed success with images being produced on film, apported objects and cryptic messages. However, skeptics remained unconvinced. The arguments against the New Age and Spiritualism are many. The topic is often ridiculed and dismissed as fantasy. They are not even given the respect of more established religions.

Gary E. Schwartz wrote a popular book about similar psychic experiments which were part of a television series, and this resulted in more experiments and journal articles, but again the scientific community did not accept the findings as proof of life after death.[222] Schwartz a Harvard trained psychologist and professor who teaches at the University of Arizona. He believes that 'everything is alive and remembers', referring to the universe.[223] This is based not just on his studies but on a personal spiritual experience he had where he was projected into outer space amongst energy and information patterns with a feeling of immortality.[224] He developed the "systemic memory hypothesis" which in summary proposes that the non-local realm is a locus of all memories and that the universe records everything as well as organizing it.

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[220] Grant Solomon, *Scole Experiment* (Campion Books, 2012). Tim Coleman, *The Afterlife Investigations: The Scole Experiments*. Documentary. 2011, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt11156348/.

[221] James Van Praagh, *Heaven and Earth: Making the Psychic Connection*. (Random House, 2003). Martini, Richard. *Hacking the Afterlife: Practical Advice from the Flipside* (Homina Publishing, 2016).

[222] Schwartz, Gary E., and William L. Simon. *The Afterlife Experiments: Breakthrough Scientific Evidence of Life After Death*. (Simon and Schuster, 2002). Beischel, Julie, and Gary E. Schwartz. "Anomalous Information Reception by Research Mediums Demonstrated Using A Novel Triple-Blind Protocol." *Explore* 3, no. 1 (2007): 23-27. Suzane Northrop, "The Afterlife Experiments HBO Special With Suzane Northrop," November 4, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JzuLqKV0L4A.

[223] Gary E. Schwartz, and Linda G. S. Russek, *The Living Energy Universe* (Hampton Roads Pub., 1999), 101.

[224] Schwartz, *Living Energy Universe,* 101.

His position is not held by the majority in his profession and their main criticism might be that it is his own personal belief based on his own experience that must have a natural explanation.

Spiritualism is spiritual perspective, with its own beliefs and assumptions. Those who accept its claims tend to belong to one group, and those of a different mindset reject it. Its assertion that deceased persons exist in a spirit world agree with the claims of NDErs, so there is an overlap of claims. NDErs tend to have a clearer memory of their experience, and it is less vague than the messages delivered by psychic mediums. Generally, however, these claims and this position remain unaccepted in the wider culture.

Robert Monroe

OBEs often occur in NDEs but can be sought through practice. Robert Monroe, founder of the Monroe Institute in 1958, taught astral travel to federal and military government officials, and developed the 'Hemi sync binaural beat' tones to facilitate the deep meditation that took the person through many levels of reality where they met other entities, including aliens, ghosts, and spirits of the deceased. Level 27 is one of the highest and is the level of the afterlife also experienced in NDEs. In a parallel development he taught remote viewers working for the CIA such as Richard Schwartz. This spurred an interest in altered states of consciousness and hence the link between their experiences, human minds and universal mind/consciousness. Monroe described the atman-brahman distinction in his own terms: I-there and we-there in his books.[225] He claimed that the binaural beats tamed the brain into a quiet state to that a spiritual state was more accessible. This is similar to the Filter Theory claim, and the Psychedelic claim, that a

[225] Robert A. Monroe, *The Ultimate Journey* (Harmony, 1996). Robert A. Monroe, *Journeys Out of the Body: The Classic Work on Out-of-Body Experience* (Harmony, 1992). Robert A. Monroe, *Far Journeys* (Harmony, 1992).

quieter brain increases OBEs. In Buddhist traditions the quiet brain of a meditator often allows the meditator of 'travel' to other realms in mind or to achieve magical *siddhis*. Robert Monroe's position was taken seriously by the American government but despite its popularity it remains a fringe science. The criticism is that this kind of position is pseudo-science, unsupported by agreed scientific methods. Science is based on scientific consensus. The majority carrier the claim of validity. His position would explain NDEs nicely, but the majority of critics would not agree that the visions experience in his explorations of the psyche are real or valid.

B. Philosophical Explanations

1. Metaphysical and Philosophical Considerations

a) The Perennial Philosophy (Philosophia Perennis): NDEs and the Core Theory

One philosophical question raised by NDEs, is whether such as universal experience originates from a core source on the 'other side.' In the 20th century the perennialist idea was that mystical experiences emanated from the same divine source but were just expressed differently to match one's culture. In other worlds the differences in exoteric religion did not matter so much because they all came from the same esoteric origin. Basic to this viewpoint is universalism, a view common amongst Theosophists, Universalists, Transcendentalists such as R.W. Emerson and also propagated by Joseph Campbell and Aldous Huxley, who was influenced by Ramakrishna, Vivekananda, and neo-Vedanta and who embraced the mantra *tat*

tvam asi (that thou art).[226] The traditionalist school of René Guénon, Frithjof Schuon, Huston Smith, Martin Lings and modern Sufi master Seyyed Hossein Nasr also embraces the *sophia perennis*, (*hikmat* in Arabic) the transcendent source of all wisdom as the single origin and root of all religions. Past academic discussion on religious experiences involved perennialist approaches so I cannot discuss NDEs without considering this angle.

Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) indeed argued that feelings of the infinite are at the root of religion, a view repeated by W.T. Stace and Robert Forman. It seems to make sense, but the problem is that this is too simple. While NDEs, which are universal across time and place, might of course all be human interactions with an afterlife, it is a leap to conclude that the afterlife is a singular source. It is possible that it is, but in theory there could be many gods, or many heavens. The overall argument in this dissertation is that there is a universal consciousness that all humans partake in, and that it is like an energetic field, that we are always a part of. So, I do not reject perennialism outright, but I identify as a neo-perennialist, but I just question the more simplistic traditional interpretations which argue for one deity or Ultimate and hence the similarity of all religions. In neo-perennialism there is room for exoteric diversity, in accordance with postcolonialism, inside a deeper esoteric unity/ or unities which can be dual, non-dual or of another incomprehensible combination.

Universality I know that there is a difference between religions, and a difference between dual and non-dual expressions of divinity or ultimates that they express. Religions often have

[226] Aldous Huxley, *The Perennial Philosophy* (Harper, 1945).

exclusive truth claims and do not often share such universality.[227] I do not pretend to have the answer, which is likely more complicated that imagined, but I am sure it relates to both 'love' and consciousness. It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to argue and try to prove that there is a single common core source providing the origin to all religions, however after reading my data I can conclude that there is a universality.

This universality is not in all the elements, although many are in common, or even in the vision of the divine, which is varied, but simply in the crucial fact that all experiencers claim that awareness and consciousness continues after death. This consciousness appears to be part of a web of consciousness that connects us all. So instead of arguing for a universality of a core element such as the tunnel, or in varied interpretations of a being of light, the commonality is in shared awareness and consciousness out of the body. While I believe personally that this may be the experience of the ocean of universal consciousness, I admit that my belief is faith-based speculation, and I do expect the actual truth of reality to be far too complex for my own understanding to grasp. Instead of arguing for the universality of NDE elements which certainly exist, the universal core of the human condition and the human experience rests simply in eternal, aware and living consciousness. This is my own version of neo perennialism and panpsychism.

Mysticism and Supreme Reality Now interestingly Hossein Nasr had his own paranormal and OBE experiences. [228] He clung to the Persian idea of death as leading to transcendence, to a

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[227] Both Mormonism and Tibetan Buddhism and Hinduism so have universalist aspects. Perhaps that is why they attract my interest. While the LDS Church is the 'true' church it still allows for universal respect and the possibility of universal salvation. There is no eternal damnation. "Universalism and the Revelations of Joseph Smith | Religious Studies Center," RSC, n.d., https://rsc.byu.edu/doctrine-covenants-revelations-context/universalism-revelations-joseph-smith (accessed 7/25/2024).

[228] Sufi - Seyyed Hossein Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, and Ramin Jahanbegloo, *In Search of the Sacred: A Conversation with Seyyed Hossein Nasr on His Life and Thought* (ABC-CLIO, 2010), 34.

higher level of being.[229] As Terry Moore points out "Nasr's opus is a quest for the 'essential elements of communiality' among religions and a demonstration of the 'transcendent unity of religions' based on an interfaith dialogue."[230] Nasr's legacy is that we ought to take the idea of truth in Ultimate Reality seriously when studying religion. His famous essay ''The Philosophia Perennis and the Study of Religion,'' is considered to be one of his most important contributions.[231] He defines his metaphysics here as the science of Ultimate Reality. His perspective when studying religions comes from this metaphysics which views Ultimate Reality as absolute and infinite. He writes: The Principle can be envisaged as the Pure Object but also as the Pure Subject or the Supreme 'I', in which case ordinary consciousness is then seen as an outward envelope of the Supreme Self rather than the descent of the Supreme Reality into lower realms of the universal hierarchy. But in either case, whether seen as the Transcendent or the Immanent, the Principle gives rise to a universe which is hierarchical, possessing many levels of existence and of states of consciousness from the Supreme Principle to Earthly man and his terrestrial ambience." [232]

This is a hierarchical universe with each human having a journey back to the divine. Religions are not reduced to the temporal and earthly, to History or Sociology, but retain this sacred aspect. Religion, he says, "It is a reality of Divine Origin. It has its archetype in the Divine Intellect and possesses levels of meaning and reality like the cosmos itself."[233] The divine reality, like a Platonic Idea, exists in and of itself whether or not humans participate via a religion, and it cannot be reduced to the material, or an aspect of human life and psychology.

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[229] Nasr, Search of the Sacred, 103.
[230] Nasr, Search of the Sacred, xiii. Introduction.
[231] Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, *The Need for a Sacred Science* (Routledge, 2005), 28.
[232] Nasr, *Need for a Sacred Science*, 56.
[233] Nasr, *Need for a Sacred Science*, 56.

Nasr, therefore, is concerned with the nature of reality. He is aware of differences between religions but insists each has a link to this transcendental reality, which as a Muslim he identified with *Allah, Al -Wahid* (The One), and the knowledge of Al-*Tawhid* (the Oneness of God).

Frithjof Schuon (1907-1998) also is famous for his phrase the 'transcendent unity of religions'. Huston Smith wrote the introduction to the Schuon's book of that name and in it he outlined the perennialist approach to the study of religion and its key terms, esoteric, exoteric, and hierarchy with God at the apex as undifferentiated Unity. Metaphysics lies beyond rationality, language and even the physical. Unity lies above the world in the transcendent. Smith says, "Unity precludes final distinction between human and divine, epistemologically between knower and known." [234]

I would add that while so much of Religionswissenschaft is 'objective and detached' this knowledge of the transcendent Unity must be subjective and personal, connected and communicative. This is why understanding the perennialist perspective is valuable for understanding NDEs, which as immersive subjective and esoteric experiences of an afterlife. While afterlives might differ in some respects, the fact that continuation of awareness and consciousness and that it is in relationship with the Absolute in some form, is a universal and mystical experience. All humans die, all humans continue in awareness after death, all humans come into contact with some form of absolute, which I prefer to call Universal Consciousness.

Those opposed to perennialism are called the contextualists represented by Steven Katz and an alternative secular theory offered by Ann Taves, who argue that culture and personal causes lead to mystical experiences. Craig Martin [235]and Jason Blum's debate provides insight

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[234] Frithjof Schuon, *The Transcendent Unity of Religions* (Theosophical Pub. House, 1984), xiii.

[235] Craig Martin, ""Yes... but...": The Neo-Perennialists." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 29, no. 4-5 (2017): 313-326.

into the academic conflicts in this area. Craig Martin argues against neo-perennialism, 'essentialism,' the 'experience-belief-community'[236] and the discipline of Religious Studies, accusing it of perpetuating fallacies.

In reply, Jason Blum defends his theological approach to his research and his identification of cross-cultural similarities between mystical accounts. He insists that comparison is a legitimate enterprise and that it can be sensitive to cultural and historical differences and avoid oversimplification. I must land on the side of Blum in this argument and insist that I am sensitive to the differences between Mormons and Tibetans and other contexts in which anomalous experiences occur, and that I am not superficial not insensitive when I compare similar and recurring phenomenological elements of religious experiences and when I speculate of possible metaphysical implications. One of Blum's points which is seen in NDEs is that despite clear links to one's culture, sometimes NDErs have experiences that defy previous beliefs and expectations, such as when atheists from a non-Christian background have unitive experiences with a Being of Light. Blum says in his defense, "My claim that mystical experiences cannot be studied in a deductive fashion that privileges context over subjective accounts is evidential in nature. I criticize the contextualist position not because it violates a theoretical preference on my part, but because it is empirically incorrect."[237]

Both Blum and I still ask why historically diverse cultures have similarities in religious experiences, despite the differences in Ultimates, and the need for this to be explained. With this goal comparison of experiential accounts is both necessary and requires a multidisciplinary approach. Critics of the perennialists however are not the majority and their main criticism is that

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[236] His term for a 'religion.'

[237] Jason Blum, "Comparison and the Spectre of Perennialism: A Reply to Craig Martin." *Method & Theory in the Study of Religion* 29, no. 4-5 (2017): 343.

it is old fashioned, even Orientalist and tainted by colonialist assumptions, simplistic and guilty of ignoring diversity. They are correct in pointing out that the characteristics of the Christian Trinitarian God, the Mormon Heavenly Father, Allah, and Eastern deities have nuanced differences. There are arguments that suggesting all these deities are the same in essence is not only incorrect but culturally inappropriate. The intricacies of comparing truth claims are not in the scope of this dissertation, however, it is still philosophically possible that there is a solution to this mystery of the Divine. Perhaps only after death will this mystery be solved.

Steve Taylor

Another important voice in the perennialist debate is Steve Taylor who also investigates NDEs and admits they have a number of core characteristics.[238] He has a more modern position that avoids some of the pitfalls of traditional perennialism. Steve Taylor has written articles on the topic of perennialism and his latest published in Sophia argues for a soft perennialism, which is more nuanced than the traditional form embraced by Grof.[239] Usually mystical experiences are discussed in the context of a religion, but Taylor pushes the modern idea that they can occur in a non-religious context also. I would say that Eben Alexander's experience is a good example of this.[240] Taylor argues that transpersonal psychology[241] should move beyond materialism and not distance itself from Near-Death Studies and ally itself with post-materialistic science.[242] He

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[238] Steve Taylor, "Mortality and Mindfulness: How Intense Encounters With Death Can Generate Spontaneous Mindfulness – Steve Taylor," December 16, 2018, https://www.stevenmtaylor.com/academic-articles/mortality-mindfulness-intense-encounters-death-can-generate-spontaneous-mindfulness/. Also Peter Fenwick, and Elizabeth Fenwick. *The Truth in the Light: An Investigation of Over 300 Near-Death Experiences*. (Berkley Books, 1997). Bruce Greyson, "Defining Near-Death Experiences." *Mortality* 4, no. 1 (1999): 7-19.

[239] Steve Taylor, "A New Day for Perennialism: The Case for a Perennial Phenomenology, or 'Soft 'Perennialism." *Sophia,* October (2023): 1-23.

[240] Eben Alexander, *Proof Of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* (Simon and Schuster, 2012). Also, Eben Alexander, The Map Of Heaven: How Science, Religion, And Ordinary People Are Proving The Afterlife (Simon and Schuster, 2014).

[241] This field has a higher standing in the UK than in the USA.

[242] S. M. Taylor, "Moving Beyond Materialism: Can Transpersonal Psychology Contribute to Cultural Transformation?" *The International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* 36, no. 2 (2018): 147-159.

states that transpersonal psychology should embrace Near-Death Studies as a natural bedfellow rather than excluding it on the grounds that a scientific field should not deal with the supernatural.[243] He adds that transpersonal psychology "ought to challenge the hegemony of ordinary awareness and play an essential role establishing the authenticity of expanded states of being."[244]

In 2016 Taylor argued for a soft perennialism that moved away from the older idea that there is an underlying spiritual reality behind all religions. There are themes and trends found across all traditions such as the 'expansion of being' which occurs not only in all traditions, but outside of religious traditions also. He argues that evidence suggests that there is a common landscape of experience that is universal which precedes conceptualization and interpretation by spiritual traditions. This is a fair argument. He thinks that there is an all-pervading spiritual energy or force, which some interpret as an Ultimate Reality, that humankind perceives.[245]

Taylor positions himself between the traditionalist perennialists and Ferrer. He says that he follows a phenomenological approach based on the study of experiences of expanded states of being from the perspective of the experiencer and especially looking at the experiences of the non- religious. While this approach might not be the best for unraveling the meaning of Mormon VTEs his approach is still of value. He does not posit an objective transcendent other, but rather an immanent and fundamental force that pervades all humans. He allows for a common psychological or experiential realm underlying all spiritual traditions and which can exist outside of them.[246] I share his approach because in my study of NDEs there did seem to be a threat of a

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[243] Taylor, *Moving Beyond Materialism,* 154.
[244] Taylor, *Moving Beyond Materialism,* 154.
[245] Taylor, S. M. "From Philosophy to Phenomenology: The Argument for a "Soft" Perennialism." *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* (2017). 17.
[246] Taylor, Philosophy to Phenomenology, 20.

common human experience shared by people of all and no religion, and even by Mormons and Buddhists.

While on the surface there are cultural differences, experiences such as autoscopy, telepathy and meeting other beings, are universal aspects tied to dying processes.[247] While this approach might not be the best for unraveling the meaning of Mormon VTEs his approach is still of value. He does not posit an objective transcendent other, but rather an immanent and fundamental force that pervades all humans. He allows for a common psychological or experiential realm underlying all spiritual traditions and which can exist outside of them.[248] I share his approach because in my study of NDEs there did seem to be a threat of a common human experience shared by people of all and no religion, and even by Mormons and Buddhists. While on the surface there are cultural differences, experiences such as autoscopy, telepathy and meeting other beings, are universal aspects tied to dying processes.[249]

Gregory Shushan's thesis is that all religions' versions of afterlife originate in an actual NDE. In other words, an afterlife experience gives rise to doctrines on that afterlife. I can go a step further and say that if there is an afterlife, and even different versions of heavens, then all of these have a Source. Rather than argue that religions have a common source, perhaps afterlife all have a common source. He also talks about various traditions sharing a universal journey, "all traditions discussed here include elements typical of NDE reports, including descriptions of leaving the body and existing in non-physical or quasi-physical form, journeys to other realms seen as a return to the origin-point or 'home,'… and/or oneness involving divinization or the

[247] Frederic Myers first coined the term *telepathy* in 1882.
[248] Taylor, Philosophy to Phenomenology, 20.
[249] Frederic Myers first coined the term telepathy in 1882.

association/union of the self with the divine or 'Ultimate Reality'." [250] Jorge Ferrer rejects both the common core theory, and he accepts diversity of religions by refuting the need for a single ultimate spiritual vision. He stresses that this does not mean he rejects the divine mystery.[251] In his own words. "a more dynamic understanding of truth as attunement to the unfolding of being" …. which "opens us up to a potential multiplicity of spiritual visions that can be firmly grounded in, and equally coherent with the mystery. This is why there may be a variety of valid spiritual cosmologies that can be equally harmonious with the mystery."[252] His idea of multiple spiritual ultimates and worlds makes sense to me, and it seems in tune with the NDE data, of Mormon and generic and Tibetan origins.

Using his approach and position, I argue that NDEs are therefore participatory experiences. Ferrer states, "In a participatory cosmos, human multidimensional cognition creatively channels and modulates the self-disclosing of the mystery through the bringing forth of visionary worlds and spiritual realities. These worlds are no longer felt to have an independently objective nature but instead become relational and intersubjective realities that can unfold in a multiplicity of ways, partly depending on the human perspectives and ways of knowing involved in the act of apprehension." [253]This move away from simplistic 'common core' explanations is mature and sophisticated. Such an approach allows room for pluralism, and the possibility of multiple truths, whilst removing the apparent contradictions of some afterlife claims. So there Spirit World can 'exist' alongside the Bardos and other conceptual realities.

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[250] Gregory Shushan, *Conceptions of the Afterlife in Early Civilizations: Universalism, Constructivism, and Near-Death Experience* (Continuum, 2009), 143.

[251] Jorge N. Ferrer, and Jacob H. Sherman, *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism.* (State University of New York Press 2008), 151.

[252] Ferrer, *Participatory Turn*, 151.

[253] Ferrer, *Participatory Turn*, 158.

In Ferrer's view, traditional perennialism falls into essentialism and the assumption of non-dual monistic metaphysics. That are limiting and suggest that there is a pregiven spiritual ultimate that everyone is experiencing independent of human participation with it.[254] He moves beyond the stalemate debate between perennialists and contexualists and proposes that a dualistic framework is abandoned in favor of an approach where "the various mystic traditions can be better seen as vehicles for the creative unfolding of different spiritual ultimates and metaphysical worlds."[255]

I can appreciate Ferrer's approach and see the benefits of this embracing plurality whist upholding the divine mystery. [256] He describes spiritual destinations (like heaven) in the plural rather than as a single goal or source., "These shores are not like a map in a geography lesson, and all shores are not necessarily out there waiting to be discovered. A participatory understanding of spiritual knowing should not be confused with the view that mystics of the various kinds and traditions simply access this pregiven spiritual referent can be reached from different vantage points." I like the idea of each of us being on our own raft on the ocean and aiming for our own paradisial beach rather than the old-fashioned metaphor of various paths up to the same mountain summit. While Ferrer rejects the core theory he accepts the similarity of the journey.

While I find Shushan's and Ferrer's positions sophisticated and convincing not all academics are convinced. They are workable theories that are attractive but not proven beyond

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[254] Jorge N. Ferrer, "The Perennial Philosophy Revisited." *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 32, no. 1 (2000): 22.

[255] Ferrer, Perennial Philosophy Revisited, 26.

[256] Jorge N. Ferrer, and Jacob H. Sherman, *Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism, Religious Studies* (State University of New York Press, 2008).

doubt. Mormons would question Ferrer's multiplicity, even though they have universalistic understandings of salvation. The role of Jesus as savior is not addressed by either Ferrer or Shushan. Tibetans might be more receptive since their own doctrines stemmed from meditative insights rather than revelation and because the participatory aspect to religious experience is acknowledged by them too.

I appreciate that even the Dalai Lama XIV seems to argue for separate ultimates and encourages everyone to take their own journey, not just the Buddhist version.[257] This is an excellent example of premier philosophizing, pointing out the pitfalls of typical assumptions and bias traps in comparative religion. However useful, this is an intellectual theory. While it is not for me to say what is true, the NDEr, who has experienced what they are convinced is Ultimate Reality, might disagree. There is something can come from the raw knowing of personal experience, beyond the mind and rationalization and clever arguments on paper, a gut deep down knowing that what they experienced was the truth for them. I cannot argue with that. If unity is not to be found in a core, or an ultimate then, could it be found in the shared experience of consciousness and is it not within Universal consciousness that diversity of consciousnesses and beaches might exist? So, while "particular rafts are needed to arrive at particular spiritual shores."[258] as Ferrer points out, I suggest that each raft is fueled by this consciousness as it sails on the ocean of awareness.

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[257] Ferrer, *Participatory Turn*, 141.

[258] Ferrer, *Participatory Turn*, 140. This also avoids the problem of conflicting truth claims and upholds universality.

b) Other Anomalous Experiences and Psychedelics [259]

Psychedelic experiences share many similarities with NDEs. Psychedelic visions provide a link between psychology and consciousness and since they are not spontaneous like NDEs, are easier to study in a lab setting. I argue that the mechanisms behind all these experiences and the realms visited are interlinked. The labels used to describe highly strange experiences are for convenience. Humans prefer categorization however these are not mutually exclusive categories, and they all meet and overlap, e.g., in sharing OBEs and telepathy. It is still not understood how exactly psychedelics produce the effects they do, and I challenge assumption the claim that the only brain and chemicals are producing the visions and experiences.[260] I believe that there is some link between visions caused either from psychedelics or NDEs.

Not only are some elements and knowledge insights shared but secondly, the psychological mood which experiencers are in seems to influence the quality and mood of the experience. In a similar vein, it is like being in the *Bardo*, where one's expectations and mood are reflected back from the cosmic mirror. The term 'entheogen' means a psychoactive substance used in a spiritual context to induce visions and shamanic journeying. In this section I will argue that there are links between entheogens and NDEs which can help provide an explanation of NDEs via the role of consciousness.

I will discuss the spiritual rather than medicinal or recreational impact of this research. *Soma* was the substance that gave visions to the ancient writers of the Vedas. The link between

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[259] The term psychedelic was coined by Humphrey Osmond in 1957 in which he wrote a paper about the important religious implications of these substances. Osmond, Humphry. "A review of the clinical effects of psychotomimetic agents." *Annals of the New York academy of sciences* 66, no. 3 (1957): 418-434.

[260] Christopher Timmermann, Leor Roseman, Sharad Haridas, et al. "Human Brain Effects of DMT Assessed via EEG-fMRI." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 120, no. 13 (2023): e2218949120. Thomas B. Roberts, ed. *Psychedelics and Spirituality: The Sacred Use of LSD, Psilocybin, and MDMA for Human Transformation*. (Park Street Press, 2020).

religion and mind-altering substances is hidden in time and controversial. Classicists have often avoided discussion of the use of psychedelics in the ancient world, but their discoveries were a byproduct of their exploration of plants as medicines and painkillers. The implications of many biological, psychological, and other theories trying to explain NDEs by their very nature draw in other altered states of reality and there seems to be a definite intersection with drug induced trips and visions.

As mentioned previously labels can be useful but so may anomalous experiences overlap that a strict focus on labels is unhelpful. So many visions and religious experiences cannot be pinned down to a single cause or label and some drug trips can verge on the edge of death too. I also prefer to avoid the term hallucinogen which seems to imply that visions are unreal fantasies. This approach is based on the fallacy of naïve realism which assumes the world is exactly as we see it. On the contrary psychedelics and NDEs take the experiencer into the realm of the ultra-real, a state that makes complete sense and provides deep insights.

D.C.A. Hillman reminds academia that what they consider to be the very foundations of Western civilization, Greek culture, was indeed a product of psychedelic knowledge. Hillman points out that more books are written in ancient Greek about plant medicine and their effects than another other topic, so many in fact that European libraries are full of yet to be translated schools. Psychotropics inspired and gave insight to both Greek and Roman philosophers and played a major role in their religions.[261] Modern studies in the West made great strides in the mid-20th century only to be banned, but recent legislation is opening up studies again into LSD, ketamine, MDMA, DMT and psilocybin, while many flock to shamanic rituals to imbibe

[261] David CA Hillman, *The Chemical Muse: Drug Use and The Roots Of Western Civilization* (Macmillan, 2008), 139.

ayahuasca or peyote.[262] As a result, there is a flood of spiritual experiences now coming from another generation and their visions and insights closely resembled those of NDErs. Many academics mentioned in this dissertation had OBEs, NDEs, or even participated in psychedelic experimentation and had strange experiences, from William James to Huxley and many others. William James, a father of the study of religious experience, used nitrous gas and achieved a unitive 'idealist' religious experience of his own.[263] It opened up their creativity, made them question reality and influenced their work. I think it is important to be aware of the interconnections between scholars and areas of study that bring light to understanding NDEs.

Studies on psychedelics not only link to NDE studies but also to the Bardo visions in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. It appears to me that there are many similarities between all these types of experience of the experience and the realm visited seem similar. This leads me to hypothesize that it is not the cause or means of entry into the otherworldly realms that is significant but the experiences themselves. e.g., Getting to Paris by bike, boat, car, or foot, all suffice to complete the journey.

Thus, I will briefly discuss scholars in this area before stating how their work leads to an explanation of anomalous visions. I wanted to note comparing the advantages of studying psychedelics compared to NDEs. Investigating NDEs is harder because a vision cannot be spontaneously initiated like taking a drug substance, and despite the movie 'Flatliners'[264], no one sane advocates playing with death. So, psychedelics are one way in which altered states of

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[262] Andrew R. Gallimore, and Rick J. Strassman. "A Model for the Application Of Target-Controlled Intravenous Infusion for a Prolonged Immersive DMT Psychedelic Experience." *Frontiers in Pharmacology* 7 (2016): 205781.

[263] William James, ed. *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature*. (Modern library, 1902). Also see, -- Humphry Osmond, "A Review of the Clinical Effects of Psychotomimetic Agents." *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 66, no. 3 (1957): 418-434.

[264] Joel Schumacher, and Peter Filardi. Flatliners (1990) IMDb, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0099582/. Five medical students experiment with "Near Death" Experiences.

consciousness can be explored in a lab.[265] The DMT realm is reported, like NDE realms, to be more real than here, and its territory is being mapped out by 'explorers.'[266]

The conclusion of many psychonauts is that there are other dimensions of experience 'out there' that are invisible to us. It is a multiverse of sorts, and some experiences encounter different types of entities there. This reminds me of the analogy of variances in perception in different dimensions moving from 2-D to 3-D to 4-D etc. in Edwin Abbott's book Flatland.[267] Human perception on Earth comes from an Earth perspective which is 3-D plus time. If time, space, and so forth are altered, then the reality we are in changes. It is a possibility to consider.[268]

The 20th century and psychedelics

In this section I will present the work of scholar who wrote about the mystical aspects of psychedelic trips. These are scholar-experiencers and much of their work is informed by their own mystical experiences. During the counter cultural revolution of the 60's many Americans experimented with psychedelics and academics conducted research into the visions produced. Harvard was one center of research. The Harvard Psilocybin Project of 1960-62 was conducted by Richard Alpert (aka Ram Dass) and Tim Leary. Aldous Huxley was linked to this project, and Huston Smith was a student who was involved also.[269] Ralph Metzner was also involved in

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[265] Justin Higginbotham, *The "Psychonauts" Training to Explore Another Dimension.* Jan 1, 2023, https://newrepublic.com/article/169525/psychonauts-training-psychedelics-dmt-extended-state.

[266] Oxford Psychedelic Society. "Mapping Out the DMT Hyperspace," Feb 13, 2023. https://youtu.be/TkyXp7thv00?si=X4Jtu0m1m1e4M2VB. David Luke, and Rory Spowers, *DMT Entity Encounters: Dialogues on the Spirit Molecule* (Park Street Press, 2021).

[267] Edwin Abbott, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (London: Seeley, 1884).

[268] Christopher Timmermann, Leor Roseman, Sharad Haridas, et al. "Human Brain Effects of DMT Assessed via EEG-fMRI." *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* 120, no. 13 (2023): e2218949120. -- O'Hare, Ryan. *Advanced Brain Imaging Study Hints at How DMT Alters Perception of Reality.* 21 March 2023. https://www.imperial.ac.uk/news/243893/advanced-brain-imaging-study-hints-dmt/.

[269] Huston Smith, *Cleansing the Doors of Perception* (Sentient Publications, 2003), describes the Harvard Psilocybin Project.

other psychedelic research with mescaline. Their work was contemporary and connected to that of Dr. Stanislav Grof, one of the greatest scholars and psychologists to work both on the area of death, and psychedelics and the *Bardo Thödol*. He began his career in Europe working with the effects of LSD on the psyche.

Stanislav Grof

Albert Hoffman (1906-2008) was a Swiss Chemist who invented LSD in 1938, and he discovered its powers when he intentionally ingested it in 1943 and had a wild bicycle ride! A young Stanislav Grof, training in psychiatry in Czechoslovakia, before moving to the USA, was to devote his life to the therapeutic effects of LSD. [270] Grof moved on to work at Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine in Baltimore and in 1073 was invited to the Easlen Institute in Big Sur, CA, where he spent fourteen years. It was here that Grof interviewed Hoffman.[271] Later Grof faculty member of the Department of Philosophy, Cosmology, and Consciousness at the California Institute of Integral Studies. [272]

Grof always argued for a sort of non-local consciousness, that the psychedelic does not cause the vision but rather opens a door or in some way allows the experiencer to connect to a realm of consciousness outside the body and brain. i.e., he is in the camp that does not think the brain and brain changes from drugs produce visions. Grof states, “Consciousness here appears as

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[270] He identified four types of LSD types of experience. Abstract-Aesthetic, Psychodymanic, Perinatal and Transpersonal. See Grof, *The Human Encounter,* 41.

[271] “Stanislav Grof Interviews Dr. Albert Hofmann,” n.d. https://maps.org/news-letters/v11n2/11222gro.html (accessed March 6, 2024).

[272] Grof has written many books on the topic of death and consciousness which contain not lonely his theories but commentary on the work of colleagues and academics that impact on his area of study. **[272]**He presents a cartography of the Human Psyche. He had many close-knit friends, including those at Easlen, including Ralph Matzner. Michael Harner, Richard Tarnas, Huston Smith, Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, Karlis Osis, Russell Noyes, Raymond Moody, Kenneth Ring, Michael Sabom, Bruce Greyson, Joseph Campbell, Jack Kornfield and Benedictine monk Brother David Steindl-Rast Each of these intellectuals contributed to the field of altered states of consciousness and a familiarity of all their work must be understood to understand the NDE phenomena. He was also influenced by Swami Paramahamsa Muktananda, head of the Siddha Yoga lineage, Tibetan Buddhists Lama Govinda, Chogyam Trungpa, and Sogyal Rinpoche. [272]

a primary characteristic of existence, preceding matter and supraordinated to it, rather than being a product of physiological process in the brain. It seems quite plausible that consciousness and awareness are essentially independent of the gross matter of the body and the brain."[273]

His book *The Human Encounter with Death* was written with two other large figures in the arena of death studies, his former wife, Joan Halifax, who is now a Buddhist hospice teacher, and Elisabeth Kübler Ross.[274] Elisabeth asks why are there so many similarities in afterlife stories reported by people around the world, despite different cultures, eras and religions with recurrence of themes and motifs?[275] So at the beginning of the book there are links made between NDEs, psychedelics, consciousness and other realms. Grof discusses how death is encountered in psychedelic contexts. In mythology there is the idea of death and rebirth. He talks about the dialectics of life and death and dimensions of consciousness, saying, "Death is one of the few universal experiences of human existence."[276] He adds that most cultures do not see death as the 'absolute termination of existence, and they have developed complex afterlife cartographies.'[277]

He mentions the similar approach between the *Bardo Thödol* and the medieval Western tradition of Ars Moriendi literature since both are examples of a manual to guide the dying. [278] He notes that psychedelics such as LSD can bring patients close to the dying experience without

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[273] Grof, The *Human Encounter,* 57.

[274] Stanislav Grof, Joan Halifax, and Kübler-Ross Elisabeth, *The Human Encounter with Death* (E.P. Dutton, 1977).

[275] Grof, *Human Encounter with Death*, viii.

[276] Grof, *Human Encounter* 1.

[277] Grof, *Human Encounter* 2.

[278] Grof, *Human Encounter* 5.

actual dying. [279] He has mapped these experiences in detail and this knowledge can be used to help those suffering emotionally and psychologically. in the face of death. [280]

In Grof's experiments he found that many patients who had the experience of death and rebirth in psychedelic treatment, had feelings of cosmic unity and they lost their fear of death. He added that these sequences they experienced resembled those in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.[281] He describes how spiritual experiences in the psychedelic experiences were not typically orthodox but fell into more of a mystical 'cosmic religion', associated with awe, wonder, dilemmas of space-time, life consciousness, the creative forces of nature and the ultimate purpose of creation. Often the patients' spiritual experience was alien to their own religious background. [282] When I read Grof after processing the NDE data I could identify similar emotions and experiences, especially the similarity of elements. Thinking again of the Mormon preexistence beliefs and experiences, Grof discovered these memories in patients and came to similar conclusions, which is uncanny. Grof focused intensely on the significance of perinatal experience and birth memories. "Individuals who have suffered through the birth-death phenomenon in their psychedelic sessions usually become open to the possibility that consciousness might be independent of the physical body and continue beyond the moment of clinical death."[283] It is genius that promoted Grof to observe and conclude this in the early 70s'. He elaborates with discussion of the ego death, a phenomenon which reminds me of the Vajrayana goal of transcending self. "The common denominator…of this group is the

[279] Grof, *Human Encounter* 9.
[280] Grof, *Human Encounter* 12.
[281] Grof, *Human Encounter* 20.
[282] Grof, *Human Encounter* 29.
[283] Grof, *Human Encounter* 52.

individual's feeling that his or her consciousness has expanded beyond the usual ego boundaries and has transcended the limitations of time and space." [284]

He explains that introspection and exteroception in normal states of consciousness in human bodies changes and in transpersonal experience usual ego boundaries and perceptions of past and future are significantly altered. Consciousness and awareness 'expand to include and encompass other people' and sometimes even ego and personal identity are lost.[285] Sometimes patients tune into the consciousness of plants and animals too and become both microcosm and macrocosm. ESP /PSI phenomena are experienced: with patients "experiencing the consciousness of all creation, OBEs, telepathy, clairvoyance, space, and time travel, meeting dead relatives, meeting deities and archetypal forms, and omniscience. [286] This phenomenon reported by Grof seem to echo visions seen by NDErs and some of the elements in Mormon VTE's. Some experiences have karmic insights and past life recollections. [287] I would add that recalling a past life does not necessarily imply that a person with an identity remembers being in another body in the past, because it can be explained by a telepathic connection with another identity, or even tapping into omniscience or the universal consciousness of all those who have lived on Earth. In NDEs it is reported that in the life review one feels the impact of words and actions from the various perspectives of all participants. Something akin to this might explain past life memories.

Many of Grof's patients reported out of body experiences and travel in spirit form, which I find much akin to that experienced in NDEs.[288] One of his dying patients, Ted, had experiences

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[284] Grof, *Human Encounter* 54.
[285] Grof, *Human Encounter* 55.
[286] Grof, *Human Encounter* 59.
[287] Grof, *Human Encounter* 58.
[288] Grof, *Human Encounter* 59.

that resembled Buddhist philosophy and Hindu cosmology, such as his visions of Samsara, the cause of suffering and need for detachment. [289] Grof reported that the encounter with death under psychedelics is indistinguishable from actual dying. [290] As we have seen, the experiences are similar to NDEs also. This leads me to consider the possibility that the realms experienced are the same, and that there are various doors of entry into this altered state. In *The Ultimate Journey : Consciousness and the Mystery of Death*, Grof discusses death and rebirth as rites of passage in human religions and societies, cultural perspectives on consciousness and the nature of reality, consciousness and death and he offers a cartography of the human psyche.[291] By this time, since psychedelic research had been banned in California in the mid-1960s,[292] and he developed Holotropic Beathing, a technique that allowed a similar altered state of consciousness.[293] Grof states that 'among the experiences occurring in holotropic states are profound sequences of psychospiritual death and rebirth and feelings of cosmic unity, which have the potential to radically transform the attitude toward death and the process of dying itself." [294] Grof has studied thousands of altered states of consciousness, and he says that common themes are found: "Three abodes of the Beyond-Heaven, Paradise, and Hell- appear with extraordinary frequency in eschatological mythology and show almost universal distribution across religions, cultures, geographic areas, and historical periods." [295]

He claims that: "Modern studies of holotropic states have shown that Heaven, Paradise, and Hell are ontologically real; they represent distinct and important states of consciousness that

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[289] Grof, *Human Encounter* 79.
[290] Grof, *Human Encounter* 131.
[291] Stanislav Grof, *The Ultimate Journey: Consciousness and the Mystery of Death* (MAPS, 2006).
[292] Federal bans came in during the 1970s. Recently research is beginning to be allowed again in certain controlled contexts.
[293] *Holotropic* means 'non ordinary state'.
[294] Grof, *Ultimate Journey*, 22.
[295] Grof, *Ultimate Journey*, 59.

all human beings can under certain circumstances experience during their lifetime. Thanatology has amassed convincing evidence that such experiences especially happen in connection with dying and death." [296]

Grof does not just write books, he uses art, mandala drawing and historical art as a source for insights into experiences. Since NDEs and LSD experiences are often so ineffable, sometimes experiences can draw rather than express them in words. This reminds me of the place of art in the Indian traditions of South Asia, where art and sculpture rather than texts, carried a great weight in the transmission of tradition. I have a great respect for Grof, who, as a brilliant academic and healer, has had a huge impact on my own perspective. Richard Tarnas said of his colleague, "There is, by definition, no subject of greater existential importance than death, and in his extraordinary fifty-year career as a courageous psychiatrist and consciousness research, Stanislav Grof has penetrated as deeply as anyone into this mystery of mysteries."[297]

Grof is more than a psychiatrist who researched psychedelic treatments, he was able to compare the visions of these altered states of awareness with mystical visions in world religions and shamanic traditions. By probing the human unconscious mind, and looking at both Eastern and Western traditions, he discovered impactful ways of approaching the nature of consciousness. I have read at least a dozen books penned by him on various aspects of human consciousness and transpersonal psychology. In many of these books he discusses the experiences passed down in the Tibetan tradition, religious experience, death and NDEs, and he argues that all these phenomena are related. I find Grof's insights helpful in understanding NDEs

[296] Grof, *Ultimate Journey*, 59.
[297] Grof, *Ultimate Journey,* Inner cover page.

and while is do not wholly agree with all his views, such as the birth trauma theory and the tunnel experience in an NDE his work is foundational.

Grof's life work has been very influential, however his position has its critics. His approaches to the use of psychedelics are no longer legal or acceptable, and his substitution method of Holotropic Breathing has not been adopted by mainstream mental health methods. His idea about the similarities between the tunnel in an NDE and the birth canal is regarded as highly speculative. One criticism might be that babies born by Cesarean section have tunnel experiences in NDEs! The main criticism is that he mixes his own spiritual beliefs and his science, which in the mainstream is frowned upon.

The Harvard Three

Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, and Ralph Metzner also discovered striking similarities between psychedelics and *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and recognizing the latter to be a guide map of both the afterlife and the psychedelic trip realms. They called their first book describing their experiments with LSD *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Leary, Alpert, and Metzner 1964). They also attempted to guide their subjects in the LSD sessions by reading passages from the *Bardo Thödol* to them.[298]

After the banning of drug experiments, Alpert adopted his personal spiritual path, influenced by Eastern philosophies, changing his name to Ram Dass and changing his mode of transportation to the vehicle of deep meditation to achieve altered states. Ram Dass chose not to continue taking drugs. He became more down to Earth and focused his life on helping others in

[298] Grof, *Ultimate Journey*, 90. Donald S. Lopez Jr, *Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), 72.

emotional or spiritual pain and confusion. Others such as (the lady who died in the snow) became addicted to psychedelics and this led to a negative outcome. Having more than one vision might be too much of a good thing and the therapeutic aspect does not heal better when there are more trips. This is why MAPS recommends therapeutic psychedelic therapy is conducted with a psychotherapist.[299]

In Good Friday 1963 Walter N. Pahnke, a student of the Harvard three, administered psilocybin in the Marsh Chapel at Boston University. Huston Smith was one of the students who volunteered to imbibe, and like some of the others, he had an intense religious experience.[300] Pahnke later specialized in psychedelics and mystical experiences.[301] In a paper on immortality he wrote. "Although the question of human immortality may always remain a tantalizing enigma, the psychedelic mystical experience at least teaches that there is more to the range of human consciousness…the answer cannot be proved either way……each person must ultimately find out for himself."[302]

In 1971 Ram Dass (aka Rupert Alpert, 1931-2019) wrote *Be Here Now* and exclaimed "To him who has had the experience no explanation is necessary, to him who has not, none is possible."[303] He challenged his generation to 'turn on', not by using psychedelics but by using meditation and other spiritual tools, like the ones he had learned in India from his gurus. It is not

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[299] "Our Work – Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies – MAPS," n.d. https://maps.org/our-work/ The Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies. (accessed March 6, 2024).

[300] Smith, Huston. *Cleansing The Doors of Perception: The Religious Significance of Entheogenic Plants and Chemicals.* (Sentient Publications, 2003), 101.

[301] Walter N. Pahnke, "Psychedelic Drugs and Mystical Experience." *International Psychiatry Clinics* (1969). Walter N. Pahnke, "The Psychedelic Mystical Experience in the Human Encounter with Death." *Harvard Theological Review* 62, no. 1 (1969): 1-21.

[302] Walter N. Pahnke, "The Psychedelic Mystical Experience in the Human Encounter with Death." *Harvard Theological Review* 62, no. 1 (1969): 20-21.

[303] Ram Dass, and Lama Foundation, *Be Here Now, Remember* (Lama Foundation; Distributed by Crown Pub., 1971). This book has no page numbers.

that psychedelics failed to work, for he admitted that they allowed one to break out of the prison box mentality into a different way of thinking and perceiving, but he recognized the drawback s of this method, which was now being banned and made illegal in the West. So, while admitting the therapeutic value of psychedelics he did not believe that alone, they led to a lasting spiritual satisfaction. This is an essential point that I believe he makes. You see, NDEs typically come with or lead to a spiritual transformation, or they bolster a preexisting faith. Using psychedelics without having a spiritual framework is inferior. Ram Dass was aware of traveling the astral planes, but he believed that the guidance of a religious tradition, such as Hinduism, was required as a guide. Being a psychonaut without a map is foolishness. A second issue is that taking such a journey with the ego intact is counterproductive. The journey is not there to be a source of entertainment or increasing attachment but as a quest for enlightenment. I agree with Ram Dass that any journey to the Otherworlds must be conducted with a reverent and sacred attitude, and that using breathwork and meditative techniques is superior and less dangerous.

Their work and positions have been valuable in the development of new understandings of the psyche, but their main impact was inspirational. Leary and Alpert were fired from Harvard for their experiments and for crossing boundaries when using drugs on students. While their work sheds light on the intricacies of mystical and psychedelic experiences and NDEs they remain controversial figures.

Rupert Sheldrake and Terence McKenna

British biologist Rupert Sheldrake, Terence McKenna (1946-2000) the ethnobotanist expert on psychedelics and shamanism, and mathematician and chaos theory expert, Ralph

Abraham joined to write about cosmic consciousness.[304] They discussed the connection between physical light and the light of consciousness, which I know is a key NDE feature. [305] Instinctively I know that if God is light and God is omniscient consciousness then they are identical. McKenna links the idea and experience of the World Soul with the sacred mushroom.

Magic mushrooms transfer the human psyche into an interplanetary transfer. [306] Perhaps the NDE creates a similar situation. Psychedelic experiences often met with entities, like those met in NDEs. Ralph Abraham describes how entities exist in many realms. There are realms of the dead, the realms of dreams and the realms of the imagination. There are also the spirits of animals, the spirits of the Earth and solar system and stars, and the angelic stellar intelligences. There are spirits of every species of plant or mushroom, each with its own way of being and experiencing the world, of participating in the while. Traveling up the great chain of being toward the world soul, we may 'get in touch with' things that preceded any capability of verbalization, which seem to reach out for contact…"[307] This is a spiritual claim, and indeed Sheldrake is a Christian. This might explain why he has been 'cancelled' by TedTalks and rejected by mainstream science. Pushing boundaries is his signature expertise and it is an important venture.

His position should not be surprising, given that for most of history, humans have accepted the idea of a spirit world.[308] There are numerous stories in popular culture and NDE reports of meeting the disease and other entities such as angels. A common theme in

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[304] Rupert Sheldrake, Terence McKenna, and Ralph Abraham, *Chaos, Creativity, And Cosmic Consciousness* (Simon and Schuster, 2001).
[305] Sheldrake, *Chaos, Creativity, And Cosmic,* 75.
[306] Sheldrake, *Chaos, Creativity, And Cosmic,* 75.
[307] Sheldrake, *Chaos, Creativity, And Cosmic,* 92.
[308] Sheldrake, *Chaos, Creativity, And Cosmic,* 92.

psychedelics are visions of animals, machine elves, or 'living fractals' and waves of colors that seem to be alive. Holden Lee, on his own YouTube channel, reports the strange occurrence of meeting the same entity in his NDE and in a separate mushroom trip twenty years later! The entity, likely his spirit guide guardian he says, was not pleased to see him during his out of body drug trip and reprimanded him telepathically to "go back because you are not supposed to be here, and I do not want to see you back here again until you are dead!" He thinks both experiences took him to the same type of realm and both imparted knowledge to him about reality and his life's purpose.[309] I messaged Holden and shared with him the idea of NDEs and psychedelics opening different doors into the same house of the 'one consciousness.' He replied in agreement and said it was a good analogy. Finding similarities between NDEs and other altered states of consciousness gives credence to the idea that there is a common explanation in universal consciousness.

Other scholars

Modern voices in the academic discussion of psychedelic experiences such as Benny Shannon, [310] Robert Forte, [311] Michael Pollan [312] and Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes [313] also see the bridge between spiritual and psychedelic experiences. The common denominator is not the cause of the experience but the role that consciousness appears to play in facilitating them all from the

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[309] Holden Lee, "I Smoked DMT and Met The Same Entity From My NDE," October 21, 2023, https://youtu.be/TaG-pm9-fbM?si=52B_hBL3-gNfSnaL.

[310] Benny Shanon, *The Antipodes of the Mind: Charting the Phenomenology of the Ayahuasca Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2006).

[311] Robert Forte, *Entheogens and the Future of Religion*, 2nd ed. (Inner Traditions International, Limited, 2012).

[312] Michael Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence* (Penguin Press, 2018).

[313] Christine Hauskeller, and Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes, eds. *Philosophy and Psychedelics: Frameworks for Exceptional Experience* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022). Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes, *Noumenautics: Metaphysics - Meta-Ethics - Psychedelics* (Psychedelic Press, 2015). / Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes, *Modes of Sentience: Psychedelics, Metaphysics, Panpsychism* (Psychedelic Press, 2022).

outside by drawing the human experiencer into a fantastic otherworldly realm. While physical changes in the body and brain might trigger or open the door to these experiences in these cases, it does not mean that the realms experienced are imaginary. They could be ontologically independent or 'out there' and it is the brain changes that facilitate entry.

The veil of amnesia reported by NDErs as necessarily imposed on spirits who are embodied for Earth life, is temporarily drawn away. Shannon's book is not just a brilliant mapping of the Ayahuasca experience but provides a map of the other worlds that can be used in the investigation of other non-ordinary states of consciousness. His academic field is cognition and the study of how the human mind operates using mental representations. He investigates the phenomenology of human experience of things in the outside world and in the inner non-physical worlds.[314] In ayahuasca visions there are guides, entities, angels, dead ancestors, animals, plant interactions, music, sense of the numinous, colored lights, knowledge and insights into reality, and advice on how to live a better life in community with others. [315] There are heavenly scenes that are blissful, rural, and urban landscapes, and realms of light. The themes of death are balanced with those of rebirth.[316]

Shannon has personally experienced visions of birth and death, and not surprisingly, the name of the Ayahuasca plant means the vine of the dead spirits.[317] Pollan's research involves

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[314] Benny Shanon, *The Representational and the Presentational: An Essay on Cognition and the Study of Mind* (Andrews UK, 2013).

[315] G. William Barnard, *Liquid Light: Ayahuasca Spirituality and the Santo Daime Tradition* (Columbia University Press, 2022). William A. Richards, and G. William Barnard. *Sacred Knowledge: Psychedelics and Religious Experiences*. (Columbia University Press, 2016), xiv. -- Daime is Ayahuasca. -- Richards was a close friend with Walter Pahnke, the lead researcher for the famous "Good Friday Experiment" that took place on April 20, 1962, in Boston University's Marsh Chapel, when twenty students from the Andover-Newton Theological School took part in a double blind study that was designed to ascertain whether psilocybin could reliably induce mystical experiences.

[316] Benny Shanon, *The Antipodes of the Mind: Charting the Phenomenology of the Ayahuasca Experience* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 127, 130, 143.

[317] Shanon, *Antipodes of the Mind,*132. -- Are Shanon's serpents, the same as the Vedic Nagas, Norse and Chinese dragons or reptilian ETs? Are these archetypes or real entities?

magic mushrooms of psilocybin and also LSD. The aim of his research if to alleviate the suffering of mental health afflictions but also included his own spiritual journeying with LSD in which he experienced a pleasant musical realm full of love and met with family who were also there, in a sort of life review.[318] Not all trips dissolve the ego but LSD tends to dimmish the controlling voice, and repressed feelings emerge and release, and modes of cognition are novel.[319]

Robert Forte is one of the leading modern experts on entheogens and their use universally in all cultures and religions. He argues in his introduction that these sacred substances offer a more direct encounter with God and therefore need to be removed from the policing of the legal and medical establishment. He also argues that the enlightenment they offer could 'save the world' from human destruction. R. Gordon Wasson, expert on the divine mushroom and *soma*, reminds Forte that the term entheogen means 'God generated within you!'[320] Wasson, both a writer and experiencer himself, describes the effect of psilocybin " As your body lies there…your soul is free, loses all sense of time, alert as it never was before, living an eternity in a night, seeing infinity in a grain of sand."[321]

While Forte, Shannon and Pollan, present with similar positions their work is seen as speculative and not taken seriously by the mainstream. It might be that in the future, when new discoveries are made, a new generation of scholars will give their work more credence.

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[318] Michael Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind: What the New Science of Psychedelics Teaches Us About Consciousness, Dying, Addiction, Depression, and Transcendence.*(Penguin Press, 2018), 247.

[319] Pollan, *How to Change Your Mind*, 253.

[320] Forte, *Entheogens and the Future*, 88. Robert Gordon Wasson, *Soma-Divine Mushroom Of Immortality* (Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1971).

[321] Wasson, R. Gordon, Albert Hofmann, and Carl AP Ruck. *The Road to Eleusis: UnVeiling the Secret of the Mysteries* (North Atlantic Books, 2008), 21. Wasson sees similarity between psilocybin mushroom and the Mystery of Eleusis. In 2nd CE Aristides the Rhetor described the experience as reaching a place inaccessible to rational cognition. He describes ineffable visions. In Greek *ekstasis* means the flight of the soul from the body ecstasy. Wasson, *Road to Eleusis*, 17-21.

Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes, based in England, has written three books and articles in the genre of the philosophy of mind, linking psychedelics with metaphysics, panpsychism, and philosophy and is one of the most active academics in modern debates in this area. Her prefers the term modes of sentience in his discussions of experiences of multiple dimensions of time and space. His book *Noumenautics* 2015 delves into psychedelic phenomenology and engages Process Theology. His 2023 book *Philosophy and Psychedelics* explores what psychedelics reveal about consciousness and argues that medicine and science should not be left alone to explain these experiences. His words read like sophisticated poetry as he deftly presents difficult philosophical concepts in eloquent arguments. One of his key arguments is that metaphysics must be involved in any discussion of induced psychedelic experiences, and he compares and analyses experiences through the lenses of certain metaphysical systems: Neutral Monism, Pantheism, Panpsychism, Animism, Substance Dualism, and Idealism.[322] He differentiates between metaphysics and mysticism, which although similar are coming from a secular rather than a religious explanation respectively. I would say my own interest and perspective is mystical here, as my aim is to deliver a spiritual explanation of NDEs, anomalous experiences and universal consciousness. While these four scholars focus on psychedelics, many of their insights and approaches can be used to investigate various explanations of NDEs, and in the future perhaps an updated 'theory of everything' will join all the perspectives together in a holistic web. Sjöstedt-Hughes presents sophisticated and convincing arguments. His work is not well known outside of his field, but he presents a novel way to navigate the complicated channels between disciplinary boundaries. Critics would argue that psychedelic visions are products of a drugged brain and that is all. I do

[322] Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes, "On the Need For Metaphysics in Psychedelic Therapy And Research." *Frontiers in Psychology* 14 (2023).

not think that psychedelic and mystical religious experiences render humans more primitive and childlike as Freudians claim. Yet when these trips deliver mystical insights, they are harder to explain away. Rather it is a letting go, an opening up, a blossoming into a larger consciousness. If anything, the sober human mind on Earth is limited, and altered states of consciousness are expansions beyond the self.

c)The Hard Problem of Consciousness and non-locality, or the Hard Problem of Matter. Spira and QP (Quantum Physics)

Does the brain create consciousness or receive it from a non-local source? Earlier in this chapter I discussed various scientific explanations of NDEs and some of them involved various theories of consciousness. Consciousness is a word that is hard to define and in the context of this dissertation refers to awareness, both individual awareness and to other levels, leading to the group consciousness, the consciousness of all types of sentient beings and even to the all-encompassing level meaning universal, even divine consciousness. Imagine the macrocosm which is also expressed in the microcosm. Its Latin root comes from the tern to know, and the connotation of knowledge as a shared state. (con-scire) which has the same root as the word 'science.' David E. Presti identifies two mysteries that defy a solution, namely the unexplained nature of the universe and the nature of mind or consciousness.[323] John Locke defined it as "the perception of what passes in a man's mind."[324]

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[323] David E. Presti, Bruce Greyson, Edward F. Kelly, et al., *Mind beyond Brain: Buddhism, Science, and the Paranormal* (Columbia University Press, 2021), xiii.

[324] John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (Philadelphia: Kay & Troutman, 1847). Ch. 27.

Consciousness is often conflated with or linked with perception, introspection, a stream of consciousness, thought, mind, and the self. It is experienced in memories, thoughts, dreams, imagination, and in rational thinking and awareness of feeling emotions and sensations. There are academic disciplines that focus on it, such as Consciousness Studies, Philosophy of Mind, Psychology, Cognitive Science, and Neuroscience. This leads to the mind - body problem, Cartesian Dualism[325] versus Monism (physicalism versus idealism) and the Hard Problem of Consciousness, as described by Chalmers, which all deal with how mind and body are or are not related.[326] Consciousness, much like the concept of love and compassion, cannot be put under the microscope, and the only way to explore it is subjectively. It is linked to experience and expressed in narratives and behavior, and it has variability in that there are different states from consciousness from waking, to dreaming, to being unconscious and altered states of religious experience.

Science likes to keep consciousness within Newtonian Laws, thus denying telepathy and ideas such as disembodied consciousness. Scholars argue whether consciousness emerged from matter and brain with evolution or the opposite, that it created all matter and the universe. There are many conflicting views indeed. Edward Kelly points out the difficulty science has in studying consciousness since it is an inner subjective state and not something open to third party observation. Mainstream science sticks to materialist assumptions. Kelly challenges the conventional wisdom that brain state changes cause psychedelic hallucinations and that since they are produced in this way, they are not transcendent. Just as the theory of non-local

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[325] Descartes compared *res cognitans*, the thought realm to *res extensa*, the material realm.

[326] Chalmers, David. "The Hard Problem of Consciousness." In *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness,* ed. Susan Schneider (2017): 32-42. David John Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

consciousness suggests the visions are entering from outside the brain, so the visions in 'trips' comes also from outside the brain. The drug might alter the receptivity of the brain, turning off the filter, and information from a grander universal consciousness floods in.[327]

Ken Wilber viewed consciousness as a spectrum with hierarchies that traversed the globe.[328] Stuart Hameroff, an anesthesiologist used to make patients unconscious by interfering with microtubules, argues that consciousness comes from microtubules in the brain interacting with quantum states. (This is called the Orch OR model.)[329] Then there are religious explanations: Mormons have doctrines about bodies, minds, and souls, and about the differences between Earth bodies and the celestial matter of bodies beyond the Veil. There is the doctrine of' intelligences' that are preexisting and co eternal with God. [330]Tibetans have vastly different views about bodies and mind streams, Tibetan Buddhism is renowned for the deep insights into consciousness it has uncovered. How does this relate to NDEs? OBEs suggest that consciousness can exist outside of the physical body, and some theological explanations suggest this aware entity is a 'soul' which is an immortal and indestructible vessel for our identity and personality.

The idea of the soul has roots in Platonic and Vedic systems and many other belief systems. How it connects to the body and the afterlife state varies according to the belief system, and even within Christianity there are various interpretations. That said, 'something' which is 'aware' leaves the body and enters the realm of the afterlife and it is important to consider how this relates to our sense of self and to ask what is doing this experiencing? This leads into the

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[327] Edward F. Kelly, Adam Crabtree, and Paul Marshall, eds. *Beyond Physicalism: Toward Reconciliation of Science and Spirituality* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2015).

[328] Ken Wilber, *The Spectrum of Consciousness* (Quest books, 1993).

[329] Stuart Hameroff, "Consciousness, neurobiology and quantum mechanics: The case for a connection." in *The Emerging Physics of Consciousness*, ed. JA Tusaynski (Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2006), 193-253.

[330] D&C 93:29-30.

quagmire of the mind-body problem, the Hard Problem of Consciousness, and varied opinions about how body, mind and soul are related. This involves ideas of Cartesian or substance dualism, and opposing non-dualist theories, including the naturalist rejection of the soul. These disputes over soul or no soul also are found in Hindu and Buddhist spiritualities, and the debate over *atman* versus *anatman*.

Other sentient beings and consciousness While consciousness is often only considered in human contexts, the research of Monica Gagliano [331] has shown that plants are conscious and can respond to Pavlovian stimuli to learn. She explores how plants and humans can interact since both are conscious beings. Peter Wohlleben has demonstrated how trees communicate and even defend each other using chemicals, mostly through their root systems.[332] Rupert Sheldrake has also focused on the conscious life of animals and explored if dogs have the capacity for NDEs.[333] So, the idea that all forms of life and sentient beings are part of the web of consciousness is not so outlandish as previously thought. While telepathy is debated in the human context, it is still unknown but possible that animals and insects in hives might be able to have some forms of mind connections still beyond our understanding. [334] Moving from an anthropocentric view of the universe mandates a shift to less human centric ideas of sentience and consciousness. The animal realm after all is part of the Tibetan Buddhist cosmology and mindsteams are able to

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[331] John C. Ryan, Patrícia I. Vieira, and Monica Gagliano. *The Mind of Plants: Narratives of Vegetal Intelligence* (Synergetic Press, 2021). Monica Gagliano, Vladyslav V. Vyazovskiy, Alexander A. Borbély, et al., "Learning by Association in Plants." *Scientific Reports* 6, no. 1 (2016): 38427.

[332] Peter Wohlleben, *The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate—Discoveries from a Secret World*. Vol. 1. (Greystone Books, 2016).

[333] Rupert Sheldrake, Pam Smart, and Michael Nahm. "Experiences of Dying Animals: Parallels With End-Of-Life Experiences in Humans." *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 37, no. 1 (2023).

[334] Palab Ghosh, “Are Animals conscious? How New Research is Changing Minds,” July 6, 2024, https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/cv223z15mpmo.

move in and out of that realm to others in the six realms. Ivan Antic includes animals and plants in his theory of the quantum field of consciousness.[335]

Charles Tart

One answer to who or what survives death was offered by Psychologist Charles Tart (1937-) explorer of altered states of consciousness and is the author of many books representing the transpersonal field pioneered at CIIS.[336] Well known for his OBE experiments, and psychokinesis experiments, he has written on remote viewing and Extrasensory Perception. Often dismissed by those in the scientific field as a parapsychologist, he has nevertheless pushed the boundaries of knowledge and encouraged a more open mind to strange anomalies. In Body Mind and Spirit which he edited; carious authors explored the parapsychology of spirituality and Tart himself asks what survives death. He states firstly that it is a serious challenge to explain this, since he has not had an NDE, suggesting that NDErs themselves know the truth of their own experience. He points out that academics write from their heads, but this topic requires the heart and some knowledge of death.

In 1985 IONS (Institute of Noetic Sciences) held a conference about survival after death at which he expressed that he would not be surprised if he survived his own death.[337] What helps him lean in this direction is his experiences with telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition,

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[335] Ivan Antić, *The Physics of Consciousness: In the Quantum Field, Minerals, Plants, Animals and Human Souls* (Samkhya Publishing Ltd., 2021).

[336] Charles T. Tart, *Altered States of Consciousness* (Anchor Books, 1972). Charles T. Tart, *Transpersonal Psychologies* (Harper & Row, 1975). Charles T. Tart, *States of Consciousness* (iUniverse.com, 2000). Charles T. Tart, *The End of Materialism: How Evidence of the Paranormal is Bringing Science and Spirit Together* (New Harbinger Publications, 2009). Charles T. Tart, *Body, Mind, Spirit: Exploring the Parapsychology of Spirituality* (Hampton Roads Pub. Co., 1997). Charles T. Tart, "Consciousness, Altered States, and Worlds Of Experience." *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 18, no. 2 (1986): 159-170. Charles T. Tart, "Six Studies of Out-Of-Body Experiences." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 17, no. 2 (1998): 73-99.

[337] Charles T. Tart, *Body, Mind, Spirit: Exploring the Parapsychology of Spirituality* (Hampton Roads Pub. Co., 1997), 172.

psychokinesis, and OBEs. He insists his thousands of experiments have demonstrated there is something behind these psi phenomena.[338] He suggests that what survives death, and what happens in psi events demonstrates that we are more than science says we are, more than we think we are, and definitely more than a body. However, he believes being here in an embodied state fulfils some purpose, a learning school, connected with learning how to love.[339] Thus the body facilitates spiritual growth and is a vehicle for souls to learn how to serve others and expand knowledge.

Tart's position is not accepted by most in academia and his claims would be dismissed as conjecture. They would accuse him of making too many convenient assumptions. As for the existence of nonphysical worlds, he assumes that if we exist after death these worlds also exist. He accepts evidence from descriptions gained from psi events and experiences such as OBEs. Critics would say these experiences are imaginary and not valid sources of evidence. In his defense I would add that while he has no definite answers, he encourages academics to explore these questions. My dissertation is but a modest attempt to add my voice to such explorations. In a topic so deep and complex, with many ridiculing even the possibilities of survival, it is important to keep an open mind and to ask the questions that push boundaries and comfort zones. The accusation that after death survival is nonsense and should be dismissed is simply not a good enough argument.

Ervin László

László is a philosopher who adheres to the theory of quantum consciousness and who proposes the Akashic field theory, named after the Vedic concept of space/upper sky. His studies

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[338] Tart, *Body, Mind, Spirit,* 177.
[339] Tart, *Body, Mind, Spirit*, 195.

are on the intersection of science, spirituality and consciousness and his thesis is that the cosmos is conscious, purposeful, and interconnected. Humans, whose souls can be reincarnated, have form and intelligence vibrate and emerge out of this Akashic field.[340] He says, "We human beings, as other natural systems, receive and decode the cosmic hologram. In *the internal perspective* we are elements in the flow of sensations that constitutes our consciousness, while in the *perspective of the external observer* we are in-formed clusters of vibration."[341] In other words huma bodies and brains transmit the intelligence of the universe. He says that the with a goal or *telos* is Oneness and love in consciousness.

I find Laszlo's theoretical approach similar to many religious and modern theories, and it is a useful perspective which might help us understand NDEs. His position helps provide an explanation of how consciousness continues independently of the body. He does mention the significance of death in his work, saying the mystery of death must be unraveled in order to understand life's meaning. When he argues that we are not just our body or limited to our personal identity, but that we have eternal consciousness, he sounds similar to Buddhist philosophers. When he links our small self with the greater divine self, he echoes the atman-Brahman relationship. He argues for nonduality and says, "Upon release of our eternal soul from our current temporal bodies, we will return to Source to experience the oneness of all things and the profound beauty of unfathomable unconditional love originating from Source, which we will

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[340] Ervin Laszlo, *The Immortal Mind: Science and the Continuity of Consciousness Beyond the Brain* (Simon and Schuster, 2014). Ervin Laszlo, *The Intelligence of the Cosmos: Why Are We Here? New Answers from the Frontiers of Science* (Simon and Schuster, 2017). -- On p. 8 he lists his eight-point Credo painting a picture of the cosmos as an infinite and eternal intelligence, which evolves with love. The Akashic field is similar to the Vedanta concept of reality as pure consciousness.

[341] Laszlo, *Intelligence of the Cosmos*, 45.

then discover to be the organizing principle of the universe."[342] His position would likely not convince those who are agnostic or hold firm to naturalism.

I see this as a perfect description of NDEr claims. His idea that the cosmos and humans are a manifestation of consciousness is important, and I agree with him that science needs to shift its paradigm and consider this perspective more seriously. It is a viable explanation of the NDE phenomena, describing how our minds return back to Source/God/*Dharmakaya* or however we name the Ground of all Being.

The relationship between the cosmos/divine and the human which is mediated through consciousness and experienced in the NDE can be understood by considering the Filter Theory, brilliantly described by Aldous Huxley. Henri Bergson (1859-1941) who upheld survivalist theories, originated the filter theory of consciousness which was informed by his own mystical experiences.[343] It was also adopted by William James in 1897. [344] Both Bergson and Huxley believed that while our bodies are separate our minds are interconnected, especially after death. If our essence is mind-based, and the physical is temporary and able to be replenished, then the process that NDErs experience is understandable.

The Filter Theory

The Filter theory goes in tandem with the idea that consciousness is non-local, meaning it exists independently of humans and sentient beings, like an energy field. One useful analogy I use to explain this theory to people is that of the internet cloud and the cell phone. If non-local

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[342] Laszlo, *Intelligence of the Cosmos*,117.

[343] Renaud Evrard, "Henri Bergson | Psi Encyclopedia," October 22, 2024, https://psi-encyclopedia.spr.ac.uk/articles/henri-bergson. Henri Bergson, "*L'Energie Spirituelle* (Alcan: Paris 1919).

[344] Jeffrey Mishlove, "Beyond the Brain: The Survival of Human Consciousness After Permanent Bodily Death." *Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies (2021).* First prize winning essay in the 2021 Bigelow Competition.

consciousness is the cloud, our brains are cell phone receivers. When we die our phones break. We then return to the cloud. Skeptics who believe that the brain produces consciousness argue that dementia and brain damage prove that a damaged brain causes a damaged mind. Filter theorists would reply that a damaged cell phone would not operate correctly and at full capacity. Non-local consciousness and filter theory also explain how telepathy works and might also explain other paranormal phenomenon such as psychic mediumship, divination, and remote viewing.[345] It also helps to explain psychedelic and meditative and mystical experiences.

If the non- local is outside time and space, prophecy becomes possible, as are visions in NDEs concerning the past and future. If NDEs are viewed through the non-local lens then the claims of mind-to-mind communication, 360 vision and super perceptions, and access to all knowledge make sense. This is speculation, but my proposal here is possible. Given that modern science has no answer, pushing the boundaries and asking pertinent questions is important. Laszlo, as Garry Jacobs describes, embraces this theory: **"**Brain is a physical receiver through which consciousness expresses, not a generator of mind." [346]

Aldous Huxley

Huxley's interpretation of the Filter Theory linked to his concept of Mind at Large is found in two of his books, *The Doors of Perception* (1954) and *Heaven and Hell* (1956). Mind at Large is like non-local consciousness in the 'cosmic cloud' but this cannot usually flow fully into the brain because there is a barrier called the 'reducing valve.' This is a sort of 'Veil' in the Mormon lingo. When the brain is influenced by psychedelics this barrier is removed allowing the

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[345] Paul Marshall, *Mystical Encounters With the Natural World: Experiences And Explanations* (OUP, 2005), 233.

[346] Laszlo, Ervin, ed. *The Intelligence of the Cosmos: Why Are We Here? : New Answers from the Frontiers of Science*. (Inner Traditions, 2017). Laszlo's website is recommended: https://thelaszloinstitute.com/.

inner human personal mind to merge with the outer cosmic consciousness.[347] A slowing down of brain activity is seen when people are under the influence of psychedelics, during meditative states and also when they are between life and death. How did Huxley know this? Like many other authors,[348] he had his own personal experiences, in this case the use of mescaline which he stated to use in 1953, and he also used LSD when he was actively dying.[349] Huxley's experiences under mescaline of Mind at Large is similar to Oceanic Boundlessness [350], as he describes "In the final stage of egolessness there is an 'obscure knowledge' that All is in all—that All is actually each. This is as near, I take it, as a finite mind can ever come to 'perceiving everything that is happening everywhere in the universe.'[351]

I propose that this filter is inoperative when a person is out of body during an NDE. The brain is bypassed in an NDE when awareness exits the body during an OBE, and even if the spirit is still embodied the filter action is diminished. NDErs claim that upon returning to the body, or during incarnation, there is imposed amnesia so that we do not remember 'the other side' too much. This is to preserve our free will and allow us to function easier in life, without interference from memories of 'the other side.' This is speculation but it is an example of how this modern thinking is a possible explanation for NDE elements. I think there is also a link between the ego and this 'valve' because it is attachment to ego that prevents access to a higher level of consciousness. This idea of a higher consciousness is ancient and appears in many religious and philosophical systems, both Eastern and Western e.g., Schopenhauer's 'better

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[347] Aldous Huxley, *The Doors of Perception* (Perennial Classics, 1954), 5-6.

[348] Wiliam James experimented with inhaling nitrous oxide gas. Christopher Bache, "Death and Rebirth in LSD Therapy: An Autobiographical Study." *Journal of Transpersonal Research* 7, no. 1 (2015) 26.

[349] Stanislav Grof, Joan Halifax, and Kübler-Ross Elisabeth, *The Human Encounter with Death* (E.P. Dutton, 1977), 15.

[350] See: Christine Hauskeller, and Peter Sjöstedt-Hughes, ed. *Philosophy and Psychedelics: Frameworks for Exceptional Experience* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2022), 6.

[351] Hauskeller, *Philosophy and Psychedelics,6.*

consciousness' and the higher consciousness ideas of the Transcendentalists and New Agers.[352] More recently NDEr Eben Alexander M.D. upheld the filter theory. He explicitly cites the most extensive contemporary work on the filter thesis, *Irreducible Mind* (2007), by the Harvard-trained neuroscientist Edward Kelly and his colleagues and he also talks about the brain blocking or Veiling the cosmic background.[353] The filter theory is very attractive however critics would argue that it is an unproven theory. Even though it provides a good explanation of many human experiences this view is rejected my mainstream Western culture and would compete with some religious explanations of how humans operate in reality.

Donald D. Hoffman

Dr. Donald D. Hoffman, Professor of Cognitive science at UCI is a progressive thinker on consciousness.[354] Like me, he belongs to the 'mind creates matter' school and he developed and combined two theories: the "multimodal user interface" (MUI) theory of perception and "conscious realism".[355] Our shared position that mind creates matter is regarded as nonsensical by mainstream science. However, there is no proof wither way on how reality actually operates. According to his position, the reality we perceive is not the way reality exists in itself. He often uses the analogy of a computer user thinking the desktop icons are the total computer without realizing the hardware and software behind the screen's appearance. [356]Humans and the Earth are

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[352] David E. Cartwright, *Schopenhauer: A Biography* (Cambridge University Press, 2010).

[353] Kripal, Flip, 22. -- Eben Alexander III, M.D., FACS, "My Experience in Coma," *AANS Neurosurgeon*, 21, no. 2, (2012), available at http://www.aansneurosurgeon. org/210212/6/1611; the Steve Paulson interview is available at http://www.btci.org/bioethics/2012/videos2012/vid3.html; and Alexander's three books.

[354] Donald D. Hoffman, *The Case against Reality: Why Evolution Hid the Truth from Our Eyes* (W. Norton & Company, 2019).

[355] Conscious Realism is described as a non-physicalist monism which holds that consciousness is the primary reality and the physical world emerges from that.

[356] Hoffman, *Case Against Reality. Here is Hoffman's website at UCI:* http://cogsci.uci.edu/~ddhoff/.

an epiphenomenon of consciousness. While this idea that our minds render what we see seems strange, the 2022 Nobel prize in Physics was awarded to John Clauser, Alain Aspect and Anton Zeilinger for their work that showed with quantum physics calculations that local realism is false. Objects are only there when our focus is on them.[357]

The implications for NDEs are that what is seen in them might also be dependent on how we choose to see them and how we relate to their contents. One of Hoffman's other common sayings is that 'Space/Time is doomed' meaning that it is mistaken to assume these are fundamental.[358] If everything comes from consciousness from where does space/time come he asks? (This is the opposite approach to the unsolved Hard Problem of Consciousness which asks how matter produces consciousness.) Based on his mathematical equations he believes that there is an infinite number of consciousness and that only a few conscious realities empty space/time. He says that other physicists are now finding realities outside of space/time. He suggests that consciousness which is the ground of all being comes into form and projects itself into other life forms such as humans to find out more about itself and to know itself. This idea is one found in many religions. He thinks life is an illusory interface and that as we observe, and we create what we see. I must say that when I listened to Hoffman talk to Lex Fridman, [359] Not all physicists agree with Hoffman however his analogy of the desktop screen and comments time/space models could explain NDERs reports of another dimension of reality in the afterlife. Tibetans would agree with his idea that we create much of what we see.

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[357] Garisto, Daniel. *The Universe Is Not Locally Real, and the Physics Nobel Prize Winners Proved It,October6, 2022,* https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-universe-is-not-locally-real-and-the-physics-nobel-prize-winners-proved-it/.

[358] Lex Fridman, "Donald Hoffman: Reality Is an Illusion - How Evolution Hid the Truth | Lex Fridman Podcast #293," June 12, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=reYdQYZ9Rj4&t=2210s.

[359] Hoffman: Reality is an Illusion. Lex Fridman Podcast.

I kept referencing back to NDEs and the implications made sense to me. It there is indeed reality outside space/time then this explains the elements of being outside of time in NDEs, and the reports that place is experienced differently. It explains how the 'spirit' goes through walls, observes yet remains invisible, and how in an instant a thought of being elsewhere takes the spirit there to observe. So many NDEr claims seem impossible and seem to go against all modern science, and yet, if Hoffman is correct, their claims make sense. As for 'going home' they are returning to source consciousness and done with the game illusion which is life on Earth.

Pim Van Lommel

Dr. Pim Van Lommel's research into NDEs is based on his acceptance of non-local consciousness and he believes it explains the interconnectedness between the living and the deceased as seen in NDEs. He states. "I describe a concept in which our endless consciousness with declarative memories finds its origin in and is stored in a non-local realm as wave-fields of information, and the brain only serves as a relay station for parts of these wave-fields of consciousness to be received into or as our waking consciousness… This view of a non-local consciousness also allows us to understand a wide variety of special states of consciousness, not only near-death experiences, but also mystical and religious experiences, deathbed visions (end-of-life experiences), shared death experiences, peri-mortem and post-mortem experiences (after death communication, or non-local interconnectedness with the consciousness of deceased relatives), … It often takes an NDE to get people to think about the possibility of experiencing consciousness independently of the body and to realize that presumably consciousness always has been and always will be, that everything and everybody is connected in higher levels of our

consciousness, that all of our thoughts will exist forever, and that death as such does not exist. ”[360] I could not express this any better and van Lommel is preaching to the converted.

While I reached my thesis independently it agrees with everything he stated here. NDEs cannot be understood until consciousness is understood, and it is most likely non-local. I reject mechanical, physicalist, reductionist and Newtonian-only interpretations of the universe and reality. He is convinced not only that there is a continuity of consciousness after death. But that it is more vivid and real than here on Earth.[361] As I read the work and discoveries of such eminent physicians who have spoken with many of their patients who have had NDEs, I wonder that if this world is an illusion, then perhaps the afterlife seems more real because it is more real, either not being an illusion or being a more real reality than here. There is the idea that realities differ based on the resonance of their vibrational levels. It is possible that the afterlife is another reality vibrating at a higher resonance than Earth. Van Lommel joined with Gregory Shushan and DJ Kadagian to write Life-After-Death: A New Perspective which focused mainly on the elements and explanations of the phenomenon.[362]

The main conclusion of this book was that the idea of non-local consciousness is the best explanation of NDEs, that consciousness is our essence, and that death is just another form of life.[363] Kadagian says: “Consciousness seems to be our essence and once we leave our body, leave our physical world, we exist as pure consciousness, beyond time and space and we are enfolded in pure unconditional love.” [364]Having examined my own data and much evidence I

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[360] Pim van Lommel, "Getting Comfortable With Near-Death Experiences: Dutch Prospective Research on Near-Death Experiences During Cardiac Arrest." *Missouri Medicine* 111, no. 2 (2014): 126.

[361] Pim van Lommel*, Consciousness beyond Life: The Science of the Near-Death Experience* (HarperOne, 2011), 114.

[362] D. J. Kadagian, Pim van Lommel, and Gregory Shushan, *The Crossover Experience: Life-after-Death Is Real* (Four Seasons Productions, 2022).

[363] Kadagian, *Crossover Experience*, 283.

[364] Kadagian, *Crossover Experience*, 283.

agree with their conclusion. Again, critics of van Lommel's position would disagree with his conclusions. There does indeed seem to be a grey zone between mainstream science and traditional religion, where some scientists blend their discipline with spiritual views and suggestions. No one wins the science versus religion argument and battle which has raged for centuries . Each side holds their own opinion. Many voices in my dissertation stand in the chasm between them. I do believe their roles are essential and important.

Federico Faggin

The inventor Federico Faggin, of the microprocessor explored the nature of consciousness in his work on non-biological AI intelligence and in doing so came to some interesting conclusions about the fundamental nature of consciousness. [365] Since machines lack qualia and emotions, he is convinced machines can never have the equivalent of a human sentient aware and conscious 'soul' and that AI and human consciousness belong to different realms. The crux of Faggin's theory is that consciousness is a quantum phenomenon and that our own consciousness is a private and pure state experience that is unique to us which contrasts with the reproducible cloning aspect of computers and AI. He asserts that consciousness is not dependent on the body, which acts like a drone, and continues to exist after death. Kastrup supports Faggin and describes him as the most well -rounded idealist alive.[366] Faggin believes that the world is more unbelievable and fantastic than we realize, and that the universe has always been conscious had free will.[367]

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[365] Faggin, Federico. *Irreducible Consciousness, Life, Computers, and Human Nature* (John Hunt Publishing Limited, 2024). Essentia Foundation, "Groundbreaking Consciousness Theory by Microprocessor Inventor | Federico Faggin & Bernardo Kastrup," June 16, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ssE4h70qKWk.

[366] Faggin *Irreducible Consciousness,* Front Matter, testimonial endorsement.

[367] Faggin, *Irreducible Consciousness*,19.

Like many of the academics discussed in this paper, he had his own awakening experience in 1990 when he 'met' a 'light of love' that is alive with energy. He writes,

> Then suddenly that light exploded. It filled the room and expanded to embrace the entire universe with the same white brilliance. I *knew* then, without a shadow of a doubt, that this was the substance out of which everything that exists is made. This was what created the universe out of itself. Then, with immense surprise, *I recognized that I was that light*! The whole experience lasted perhaps a minute, and it changed me forever. My relationship with the world had always been as a separate observer perceiving the universe as outside myself and disconnected from me. What made this event astonishing was its impossible perspective because I was the experiencer the experience. I was simultaneously *both and* the observer of the world and the world. I was the world observing itself! And I was concurrently *knowing* that the world is made of a "substance" that feels like love and that *I am* that!"[368]

Faggin had a classic unitive anomalous experience, classed as non-dual and involving a distinguishing of his ego, which impacted him both mentally and physically. This description can be understood both from a quantum physics and an Eastern philosophical perspective, but to be fully understood need to be felt and actually experienced.[369] He disputes the classical claims that the physical world is all that exists (naturalism), and its existence is independent of the observer. This made me question that if the Earth world is not independent, then is the afterlife similarly dependent on our observations? I raise the question, does the afterlife depend on our observation and perception? Or is the ground of consciousness ontologically independent and what we see is how we interact with it? It is indeed a mystery.

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[368] Faggin, *Irreducible Consciousness,* 17-19. Garisto, Daniel, "The Universe Is Not Locally Real, and the Physics Nobel Prize Winners Proved It." *Scientific American*, May 28, 2024, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-universe-is-not-locally-real-and-the-physics-nobel-prize-winners-proved-it/.

[369] Faggin, *Irreducible Consciousness,* 17-19. Faggin developed a theory and new terms such as C-Space, I-space, P-Space, identity and seity to describe how individual entities fit into the greater consciousness. The glossary at the end of his book explains all these terms. Seity is a quantum entity with three irreducible and indivisible fundamental properties: consciousness, agency, and identity.

While this was not an NDE, it was an OBE and the realization of deep knowledge of the nature of self and the universe, is an element of many mystical, psychedelic, and religious experiences. I understand Faggin's position and agree totally that these experiences and consciousness are intimately related. To understand one, the other must also be understood. His explanation is the similar to other classic Neoplatonic and Eastern explanations of consciousness creating matter and entities in order to experience itself, using amnesia to enhance the separation, and then at death, the return to source. Faggin like myself and so many others call for a 21st century science of consciousness that goes beyond current scientific assumptions, and this will enable us to investigate NDEs. He asks for human inner worlds and lived knowing to be taken seriously and argues that quantum physics already upholds the holistic aspect of reality. If the universe is alive, omniscient, and fully aware, conscious and interactive I think we are close to an explanation. Faggin stands in the grey zone. He has both scientific training and had had a religious experience. Critics can remain skeptical about his opinions but maybe one day artificial intelligence can provide us with better answers?

It is quite easy to travel from theories such as non-local consciousness and go down a myriad of speculative rabbit holes. Proposals to describe the universe can come from religions or they can venture off into sci-fi ideas such as the simulation theory, matrix theory, many worlds theory of Hugh Everett III, multiverse theory, parallel universe theory, holographic model theory and computer game simulation theory.[370] Even animals live on this same planet as humans but experience a different reality, let alone pondering the vastness of the universe and other dimensions. Dogs hear things we cannot hear. Birds, butterflies, and salmon navigate and

[370] P. Weir, The Truman Show, Paramount Pictures. APA (1998). This is an example of living in a 'fake reality' world. Byrne, Peter. "The Many Worlds of Hugh Everett." *Scientific American*, February 20, 2024, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/hugh-everett-biography/.

migrate using faculties we do not understand. I love the article by Thomas Nagel, who considered consciousness, asking us to consider what it is like to be a bat.[371] His point was that conscious experience occurs at many levels, but he pointed out also the quagmire of difficulties trying to explain the meaning of subjective experiences. He suggested formulating an objective phenomenology. Just as trying to describe red to a blind person seems impossible, trying to explain NDE experiences to skeptics involves a huge gap. He was also focusing on organisms but what if our biological organism aspects are irrelevant and our eternal nature is just consciousness? I don't think I agree that our consciousness is dissimilar to that of bats or other animals, it is just a different level. [372] In this way the level of NDErs consciousness is higher than ours. In bodies our consciousness is limited but not when we exit the body. Earth bound consciousness is linked to sensory organs but in NDEs these organs no longer exist, yet input continues. It is mysterious indeed. I have no answer but like Nagel I agree that reductionism/physicalism is not equipped to explain consciousness or a personal subjective experience.

Rupert Sheldrake

Another academic who I highly respect is Rupert Sheldrake who also discusses consciousness, Morphic fields[373] and animals. [374]I absolutely agree with him in his assertion that

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[371] Thomas Nagel, "What is it Like to be a Bat?" In *The language and thought series*, 159-168. Harvard University Press, 1980.

[372] Lanza, *Grand Biometric Design,*110.

[373] Morphic Resonance is a theory that explains connections between species across time and resides in a collective memory. It works through morphic fields, and this explains behaviors. It connects memory across time. It is not stored in the brains of beings but in the field of consciousness.

[374] Matthew Fox, and Rupert Sheldrake. *The Physics of Angels: Exploring the Realm Where Science and Spirit Meet*. (Monkfish Book Publishing, 2014). Rupert Sheldrake, Terence K McKenna, and Ralph Abraham. *The Evolutionary Mind: Conversations on Science, Imagination & Spirit*. Rev. ed. (Monkfish Book Pub, 2005). Rupert Sheldrake, Terence K McKenna, and Ralph Abraham. *Chaos, Creativity, and Cosmic Consciousness* (Park Street Press, 2001).

the cosmos is alive and vibrant, and not unconscious and dead as mainstream science asserts. Sheldrake, as an Anglican Christian, believes in life after death and these views are communicated in many of his books and lectures. [375]He is regularly active on social media as he confidently and unabashedly challenges materialism. His view of the universe of one full of life. One of my favorite papers of his discusses end of life experience in both humans and animals.[376] Just as Moody classed human NDEs, Sheldrake classed similar occurrence with animals. He writes, "We were able to group these experiences into specific categories, which we termed the last goodbyes, last visits, last rally, retreating into solitude, unusual premonitions of death, somatic surprises, terminal lucidity in animals, and potential near-death visions in animals." He argues that as physiological beings, animals, just like humans, might have their own inner lives and their own NDEs.

He features in many videos online explaining his views on death. In "The Day of the Dead" he even compares the Catholic Purgatory with the Tibetan Bardo and suggests that "everyone gets what they believe in and expect." [377] This aspect of expectation is one I will return to in my conclusion because it tallies with the concept of co-creation. He challenges the idea that matter cannot be conscious. This reminds me of Rupert Spira's proposal that we ought to consider the Hard Problem of Matter rather than the Hard Problem of Consciousness! He does

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[375] Sheldrake, *Chaos, Creativity, and Cosmic Consciousness*, 86. Rupert Sheldrake, and Matthew Fox. *The Physics of Angels* (Monkfish Book Publishing,1996). Rupert Sheldrake, *The Science Delusion: Freeing the Spirit of Enquiry* (Coronet, 2012).

[376] Sheldrake, Rupert, Pam Smart, and Michael Nahm. 2023. "Experiences of Dying Animals: Parallels With End-Of-Life Experiences in Humans". *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 37 (1):42-58.

[377] Rupert Sheldrake , "What happens When We Die?" June 4, 2019, https://youtu.be/vWuR7Z9AcH0?si=cDb4W-cVIfyVyj-e ; Mark Vernon, "The Day of the Dead - A Conversation with Rupert Sheldrake," Oct 29, 2020, https://youtu.be/qBT_LiZiV3E?si=da-PMQfugSpFqgFj_ ; Mark Vernon, "End of Life Experiences A Conversation with Rupert Sheldrake," #Resurrection #NDEs," June 2, 2023, https://youtu.be/2tl1A0VbmC8?si=9tNtgq1w_SkD0oD6.

Rupert's website can be found here: https://www.sheldrake.org/files/pdfs/.

not claim that the sun is conscious but as he pushes the boundaries, he asks us to ponder why not?[378] Generally he advocates for panentheism, identifying the consciousness that is in nature with God, and that God produces consciousness which underlies everything. He refutes the bottom-up idea that consciousness is produced from brains.[379] As I previously mentioned many academics mentioned here debate together.

In 2024 Sheldrake and Kastrup debated the nature of the cosmic mind.[380] While their ideas overlap and also diverge, they both contribute to the important discussion of consciousness and how it affects reality…and it is in these areas that the mystery of NDEs lies. Sheldrake contents that that the Ultimate Reality or Consciousness has a trinitarian structure, in other words it has a ground of Consciousness itself a ground of conscious being which in the Hindu model is sat as in *sat chit ananda*… is not just Consciousness in the sense of a knower and the known but also a principle of energy which is what underlies the changing realities of the world. They even discuss if atomic particles or even large cosmic entities are conscious and then on to discuss the World Soul idea of Plotinus. Then they move to the question of why the divine mind expresses itself in multiplicity. Why is this theorization important to explanation NDEs? Philosophy can provide possible ideas about the big picture, and alternative suggestions about how the universe might operate. Ultimately the living might bever understand the realms of the afterlife, but we can begin to have a deep appreciation of life and death through such theorizing. As a scholar I

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[378]. Hollyhock Life, "Rediscovering God With Rupert Sheldrake," August 25, 2014, https://youtu.be/oxsNpMpPT3Q?si=jiq16Mu_eHDqeu1s.

[379] Iain McGilchrist - The Intersection of Consciousness and Matter - Beyond the Brain 2023. Rupert Sheldrake. Dec. 2023. https://youtu.be/KyNgE6RsGnw?si=U_ctg-Rk4CfTtYvH.

[380] Rupert Sheldrake, "Bernardo Kastrup and Rupert Sheldrake: The Nature of the Cosmic Mind, With Jonas Atlas," January 5, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wi1U7Cw4XV0.

need to be aware of all my peers' approaches so that I can measure and formulate my own ideas, and I find I agree with many of them.[381]

The Hard Problem of Matter

Rupert Spira and Donald Hoffman had a debate shared on social media about the Hard Problem of Consciousness. Spira turned this conundrum on its head and declared that in a few years such an approach would be ridiculed similar to the Flat Earth Theory. He explained that there is no Hard Problem of Consciousness because the physicalist assumption that mind emerges and evolves out of matter, biological organisms and brains is false. Scientists are looking at reality he says through tinted lenses, that mirror back appearances with a tint, when they are biased by their own limitations. He says what is more interesting is the hard problem of matter. As an analogy if the cinema screen represents consciousness, which is there before the movie, the physicalist approach is it is like saying the movie generated the screen, or the clouds generated the sky, or the waves generated the ocean. Instead, the question is how did the screen display the movie etc. how did matter emerge from mind? This pertains to NDEs because unless reality and consciousness are understood, NDEs remain an enigma. If we exist as consciousness, then that is are true form, not the body.

[381] Science and Nonduality, "The Hard Problem of Matter: Deepak Chopra and Rupert Spira," September 19, 2022,https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iHXgRFOOEB4.

(a)Non -dual Philosophy

Bernardo Kastrup

The idealist philosopher Bernardo Kastrup is in my opinion one of the most revolutionary intellectuals in modern day debates on consciousness and the state of reality. His ideas are important to me because he offers a way to understand NDEs. Kastrup proposes an idealist ontology and argues that there is only cosmic consciousness. All living beings are "dissociated alters of cosmic consciousness." The inanimate world is the extrinsic appearance of these thoughts. He says his approach, unlike other explanations of consciousness, avoids the Hard Problem of Consciousness. He dismisses physicalism, as well as its alternative, Cartesian substance dualism. He discusses the problems with bottom-up panpsychism. [382]Then he examines the idea that the whole universe is a unitary conscious entity, called cosmopsychism. He finds that none of these proposals answer the key problems of consciousness satisfactorily. On Earth we seemingly inhabit the same environment so how do we all perceive a similar world? Now idealism suggests that the world is imagined so why do we imagine the same world, he asks? He provides an explanation complete with diagrams. Alters are immersed, he says, in a common phenomenal environment. "All alters are immersed, like islands of a single ocean, in the thoughts that constitute the concealed side of the inanimate cosmos."[383] He adds:

We, as well as all other living organisms are but dissociated alters of cosmic consciousness, surrounded by thoughts. The inanimate world we see around us is the revealed

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[382] According to Rupert Spira, the belief that the universe is aware is simply an extension of the materialist belief that the body is aware. He adds that 'Only awareness is aware! Only consciousness is conscious. The universe is not conscious; consciousness *is* the universe!' Spira, *The Nature of Consciousness,* 31.

[383] Bernardo Kastrup, "The Universe in Consciousness." *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 25, no. 5-6 (2018):152.

appearance of these thoughts. The living organisms we share the world with are the revealed appearances of other dissociated alters." [384]

When I read this article, which is essentially about this Earth life, I wondered if a similar idealism operated in the after-death state. Outside of a physical environment, in a disembodied state, perhaps the experiences are imagined, and similarly imagined by persons from a coming similar Earthly cultural perspective. More work can be done to explore this suggestion. Kastrup wrote this article called *Reasonable Inferences from Quantum Mechanics* as a reply to Mriczkowski and Malozemoff's paper about the misuse of quantum physics in psychic literature.[385] As a theologian, with elementary knowledge of physics, it is easy to fall into a trap when using physics to explain metaphysical things and religious experiences. This is one reason why interdisciplinary studies are superior.

Kastrup is sympathetic to these authors who write in the Journal of Near-Death Studies and in his conclusion, he agrees with their main point that non-scientists would not misappropriate science to claim that parapsychological things are scientific. Discussing the nature of reality and quantum mechanics (QM) is not easy and I believe that speculative theorizing leading to inconclusive conjectures is the usual outcome. He discusses nine points in their paper such as the idea that the world is an illusion.[386] I point out with Kastrup, that most people assume the world is real. After deep reflection he concludes that according to QM, the physical world can be interpretated as a kind of illusion because "prior to being observed, physical qualities are only potentials modeled by waves of possibilities as opposed to defined

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[384] Kastrup, *Universe in Consciousness,* 153.

[385] Alexis P. Malozemoff, and Jack A. Mroczkowski. "Quantum Misuse in Psychic Literature: A Rejoinder." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 37, no. 3 (2019): 201-221.

[386] Kastrup, *Universe in Consciousness,* 187.

realities."[387] Next Kastrup argues against the authors who criticized Deepak Chopra's view that QM backs up his belief that "we create our bodies as we create our experience of the world."[388] He supports Chopra's position.

I agree that QM causes confusion amongst the uninitiated, just as the complex eloquence of Kastrup's writing might confuse those without a background in philosophy. He defends his idealism however, and this is why it applies to my study of NDEs, because the power of mind to create reality, and the bizarre power of our thoughts to project what we perceive around us, might just operate in a disembodied state. This is a speculation, but it is a pertinent query. I do not claim to know how the reality of this world and the reality of the afterlife worlds compare, but I do see that the power of mind, intention and consciousness is the common denominator in both.

If I argued from Kastrup's position I would say NDEs are tapping into cosmic consciousness.[389] The most valuable analogy I draw from Kastrup's work is that of the river and whirlpool, which is often used by Rupert Spira to demonstrate enlightenment and our true nature.[390] Idealism is found in Eastern philosophy and is not just a branch of Western thought.[391]

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[387] Kastrup, *Universe in Consciousness,* 188.

[388] Kastrup, *Universe in Consciousness,* 189.

[389] In a video presentation he argued that people in psychedelic trips tap into cosmic consciousness. Paul Austin Murphy , "Bernardo Kastrup's Spiritual Take on Psychedelic Experiences and Cosmic Consciousness." *Medium*, May 30, 2024, https://medium.com/paul-austin-murphys-essays-on-philosophy/bernardo-kastrups-spiritual-take-on-psychedelic-experiences-and-cosmic-consciousness-45287869f028.

[390] Bernardo Kastrup, *Why Materialism is Baloney: How True Skeptics Know There is No Death and Fathom Answers to Life, The Universe, And Everything.* (John Hunt Publishing, 2014).

Nithin Nagaraj, "Whirlpools in Universal Consciousness." Essentia Foundation, January 10, 2022. https://www.essentiafoundation.org/whirlpools-in-universal-consciousness/reading/. Rupert Spira. "Welcome the Totality of Experience | Media | Rupert Spira," n.d. https://rupertspira.com/teachings/single/welcome-the-totality-of-experience?player=video (accessed August 9, 2024).

[391] Vajrayana was heavily influenced and has roots in the Hindu Yogacara school, although scholars debate how much idealism is expressed in this school. Advaita Vedanta and other non-dualistic schools are an example of idealism in Eastern religion. Swami Vivekananda, 1983, used a whirlpool metaphor also.

In his book *Why Materialism is Baloney* (2014) [392]Kastrup challenges the mainstream materialist assumption that the mind is the brain and in doing so is in accord with Vajrayana perspectives. The book delves into the mind-body problem and neuroscience, and he offers the famous filter hypothesis, used in the NDE Studies world by Dr. Pim van Lommel, which holds that the brain is simply "a mechanism for filtering out experiences"[393] The filter theory works well also for psychedelic experiences as well as NDEs. Jeffrey Kripal also discusses the filter theory and suggests that when consciousness is freed from the brain it also freed from buffers and blocks that prevent full knowing. [394] Kastrup explains why interdisciplinary studies are superior. Kastrup is sympathetic to these authors who write on the Journal of Near-Death Studies and in his conclusion, he agrees with their main point that non-scientists would not misappropriate science to claim that:

> the filter hypothesis implies that consciousness, in its unfiltered state, is unbound. As such, consciousness must be fundamentally unitary and non-individualized, for separateness and individualization entail boundaries. The emergence of multiple, separate and different conscious perspectives, or egos, is a consequence of the filtering and localization process: different egos, entailing different perspectives on space-time, retain awareness of different subsets of all potential subjective experiences, the rest being filtered out. It is the differences across subsets that give each ego its idiosyncratic vantage point, personal history, and sense of personal identity. The subjective experiences that are filtered out become the so-called unconscious mind of the respective ego."[395]

This theory is linked to the theory of non-local consciousness and explains transpersonal experiences and is the collective unconscious described by Carl Jung. [396] Kastrup calls the mind

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[392] Bernardo Kastrup, *Why Materialism Is Baloney: How True Skeptics Know There Is No Death and Fathom Answers to Life, the Universe and Everything.* Winchester, UK: Iff Books, 2014.

[393] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 24. Pim Van Lommel, "Near-Death Experience, Consciousness, and the Brain: A New Concept about the Continuity of our Consciousness Based on Recent Scientific Research on Near-death Experience in Survivors of Cardiac Arrest." *World Futures* 62, no. 1-2 (2006): 134-151.

[394] Jeffrey J. Kripal, *The Flip: Epiphanies of Mind and the Future of Knowledge*. (Bellevue Literary Press, 2019), 68.

[395] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 25.

[396] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 25-6 and 62.

the ‘medium of reality’ and insists that there is One mind.[397] He denies that his idealism is solipsism, as this dream of ours is not our own private dream.[398]

Kastrup’s whirlpool metaphor, which has similarities to the ideas of Vivekananda, is a way to explain how our ego minds exist in the larger mind of the universe. [399] His metaphor tries to explain mind which is like a stream where the water is not localized, seeing each individual mind or ‘dissociated alter’ as a whirlpool in a river of universal consciousness. The whirlpool is made of water and not separate from the river.[400] The whirlpool represents a partial localization of the flow of experiences in the stream. This localization demarcates a centralized, local perspective: the very center of the whirlpool, the vantage point from which each one of us witnesses our personal subset of the contents of mind. This is, after all, how we ordinarily experience reality: from a particular vantage point in the middle of the vortex of experiences swirling around us. Ordinarily, we are only aware of the flow of water molecules captured in our respective whirlpool, not the broader stream outside.[401] In this river there are multiple whirlpools of egoic awareness, they share vibratory patterns, and they communicate with each other and with this collective unconscious their perceptions that are associated with the empirical world resonate with each other.[402] “Language, as a communication tool, has evolved to capture only these abstract cross-correspondences. As a result, we naïvely reassure ourselves with words that we are all living in the same world.”[403]

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[397] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 30-31.
[398] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 35.
[399] Robert Cathomas,“Introducing… Bernardo Kastrup and Swami Sarvapriyananda: A Dialogue About Consciousness,” Beshara Magazine | Unity in the Contemporary World, August 12, 2023, https://besharamagazine.org/newsandviews/introducing-bernardo-kastrup-and-swami-sarvapriyananda/.
[400] Nagaraj, Whirlpools in Universal.
[401] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 43.
[402] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 42-46, 73.
[403] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 42. The Whirlpool Metaphor.

Later Kastrup develops his idea into a discussion of multiple communicating whirlpools. Two people would correspond to two whirlpools in the river. There is a transfer of information between the two whirlpools, and indeed between all the whirlpools of all other humans. The waves and dynamics of each whirlpool might be felt by all the others, and this could be seen if we imagine putting dye into a whirlpool and seeing how it spreads. The ripples I make affect others in consciousness.[404] This might explain why our 'heaven' experiences are not singular but involve other 'small' consciousnesses (entities) within a larger consciousness. Mind, as the center cone in each whirlpool, has the ability to self-reflect upon itself, and that is egoic awareness. When this ego awareness sees and experiences ripples these are experiences.[405] If this is how we experience the world, perhaps it is also how we experience the after-death state too.

To clarify Kastrup's idealist position, he rejects the materialist view of consciousness as something produced by the brain and proposes an alternative hypothesis which does not reduce consciousness to matter or physical entities but instead holds it to be an ontological primitive, independent of matter and irreducible.[406] He states that "Near-death experiences are the ultimate example of non-local transpersonal experiences associated with not only reduced, but practically absent brain activity."[407] NDEs in his opinion cross space and time, access parallel realities, allow communication with entities, give insights about the purpose of life and are highly structured coherent experiences that feature hyper-reality.[408] This, he proposes, proves the filter theory and rule out materialism.

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[404] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 48-9.
[405] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 57.
[406] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 24.
[407] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 27.
[408] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 27-28.

His opinion is that brain imaging studies are redundant because scientists assume brain causes mind when in fact, he holds, the brain is a creation of the mind and part of universal consciousness, part of the field of subjectivity that underlies us. Our head is not a cup in which consciousness resides rather the other way round.[409] He adds that we are subjective and mental creatures and *"*when our mentation is observed from the outside looks like a physical body, a brain and brain activity."[410] He has the idea that universal consciousness splits into alters, which is a term usually used in psychiatry to describe multiple personality disorder. Each human represents a different alter of the whole. I think therefore that this approach can be used to understand the afterlife as that state when out 'alter self' is reabsorbed into consciousness.

The heaven experienced would be a state of 'mind' also, just as the Earth is a 'state of mind' now for us. So, life is in fact state of dissociation and after death is not, it is a clearer vision of reality. Kastrup says that psychedelics do reduce brain activity and open up a richer more 'real experience' which hinders the dissociation and renders us more receptive to the state beyond the ego.[411]

Kastrup's position is sophisticated and complex, and his analogies of the whirlpool would be understood by Tibetan Buddhists and Hindus. It is a convincing argument also. However, it contrasts with the absolute physicality of the Mormon Afterlife and the physical immortal bodies of humans, Jesus and Heavenly Father. The Mormon position is that the heavenly realms are literally real and solid and definitely not made of mind. Secondly there is no scientific proof that Kastrup's idealism is correct. The world examined by science is believed to be solid and

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[409] Richard H. Jones, *Piercing the Veil: Comparing Science and Mysticism as Ways of Knowing Reality* (Jackson Square Books, 2010), 86.

[410] OPEN Foundation, "Your Consciousness Is Not in Your Head," Interview With Bernardo Kastrup, December 23, 2023,https://youtu.be/XoJWqCH4Xrw?si=vTJCsB2g-1bDHXIW.

[411] Open Foundation Dec 23, 2023 'Your Consciousness is Not in your Head.'

physical. Critics might also agree with him about the absolute nature of cosmic consciousness but argue that it can express as physical matter, and this is not necessarily an illusion. Kastrup's mind-only idealism is attractive but fails to explain where matter comes from, rather it is explained away, which is problematic for a lot of people.

Kastrup is influenced by Arthur Schopenhauer's (1788-1860) idea of will and representation. This is the perspective that the objective world in space/ time exists only as a representation projected by a cognizing person/subject, rather than 'existing in itself.' [412]The inner essence of everything is the 'will' which objectifies the representation. He says that from our external standpoint, we only have the person's appearances to apprehend, and, in this sense, the person's consciousness remains forever invisible to us. Indeed, our respective consciousnesses are all invisible to one another. Therefore, it is fruitless to find the inner essence of things and we can only deal with appearances. The world is a subjective representation each person perceives and is a reflection of ourselves. Our knowledge is perceptually based. [413] Wicks adds that at the individual level, we find ourselves in the ordinary world of spatiotemporal objects and desire. At the universal level, we realize ourselves as relatively time free, desire-free subjects who are correspondingly aware of timeless objects, the Platonic Ideas.[414]

Wicks highlights Schopenhauer's pessimism. Schopenhauer argues that the universe's core is nothing but a blind, timeless, pointless urge. The most appropriate word he can propose to describe this reality is "Will," He describes Will as our feelings of lack, of empty frustration and indeterminate yearning. He adds that Will is unconscious, uncaring, unknowing, amoral, and

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[412] Consider Robert Wicks explanation of Schopenhauer's theory.

[413] Robert L. Wicks, *Schopenhauer's 'the World As Will and Representation'*: *A Reader's Guide* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2011), 15.

[414] Wicks, *Schopenhauer's 'the World,* 9,16.

fundamentally goalless. Schopenhauer's Will reminds me of Buddhism's attachment and grasping. It is a heavy perspective for a young man of thirty to have, his age when he wrote The World as Will and Representation. [415] He has an atheistic approach in his philosophy which is unlike the non-theism of Buddhism but on a similar track of thinking. Incidentally, Wicks confirmed my suspicions that like many academics of his time he had read the Hindu Texts, The Bhagavad Gita and the Upanishads, in 1813 and 1914. [416]Wicks said he had come to his own views independently but was impressed to find that views in these texts were similar to his own. He agreed that the best path was to resist the Will, to resist the dream that the world is and focus on the inner self.[417] The reports of NDErs and their juxtaposition of Earth and heaven is more optimistic than Schopenhauer's view, nevertheless his pointing out of not to take things at face value is a lesson that can be applied to the interpretation of how Earth and heaven are experienced, described and represented.

I find Kastrup's approach useful in understanding NDEs. In his idealism phenomena exist in the medium of mind. This is the opposite of realism which states objects exist independently of mind. So, heaven for example, from a realist viewpoint exists independently from us and we 'go' to it. Heaven in an idealist viewpoint exists in our consciousness, we do not go to it, we are it and that may explain why everyone has a slightly unique experience, much like our own dream states. I could take this argument further and argue that infinite heavens are possible in an

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[415] Arthur Schopenhauer, and E. F. J Payne. *The World As Will and Representation*. Vol. Volumes 1& 2. (Dover Publications, 1969).

[416] Stephen Cross, *Schopenhauer's Encounter with Indian Thought: Representation and Will and Their Indian Parallels.* Society for Asian and Comparative Philosophy, No. 24. (University of Hawai'i Press, 2013).

[417] Wicks, *Schopenhauer's 'the World,* 12.

infinite consciousness.[418] Heaven might possibly exist, I suggest, in the mind of the experiencer, even when that mind is out of the body. This is one of various possible explanations for NDEs. I agree with Kastrup that the West takes it for granted that minds are individual and persona and discontinuous across persons, totally separate. He thinks it is a broad and continuous medium across and outside of time and space. The egoic mind with which we identify as 'me' is simply a small band or segment of the broad universal canvas of mind.[419]

Kastrup is here coming close to a Tibetan perspective of mind, and one that explains the elements shared in NDEs, which is an experience where ego falls away. It is the filter that gives you the impression of separateness but when the body and the filter is gone you are part of the whole again. Kastrup's theory is not easy to understand, and many Christians might have issues with its monism, because he states that in his theory there is no soul separate from the body. There are only the movements of mind. The body is a partial image of the process of mind. "The process in question is a form of self-localization of consciousness analogous to how a whirlpool is a process of self-localization of water. When life ends, he says, consciousness does not cease to exist be simply de-localizes and flows more freely., while the body like the whirlpool disappear.[420] Neither the water nor consciousness cease to exist, just the configuration.[421]

This model is far from the ghost in the machine explanation of the dualists. It is also at odds with Mormon doctrines of the resurrection of the physical body, and its final reunification

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[418] He holds that idealism, the theory that all reality is in mind, is not panpsychism which claims that everything is conscious. Rocks and chairs do not have experiences like humans. To say everything is in mind means that things lay out in the mind of the conscious observer. So, dreams are real as thy e exist in the mind of the dreamer/observer but the stuff in your dreams has no external independent existence. -- Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 36.

[419] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 33.

[420] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 85.

[421] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 85 -The corpse remains to exist in the minds of others like an echo. -- See Alan Watts and the corpse as an echo also in Alan Watts, *The Book: On the Taboo against Knowing who you are* (Vintage, 2011), 27.

with the soul. It is also at odds with ideas of having a subtle body after death. To be fair, even Kastrup does not claim to have all the answers about what really happens after death. His metaphysics is just a useful tool to try to understand the ultimate mystery. He does think that after death the mind will become more conscious because it no longer has obfuscations, and we remember everything. He says, "many Near-Death Experiences seem to suggest that a degree of self-reflectiveness and personal identity survive death."[422] Just as we feel we are the same person we were as children, so it will be after death.[423] His final word on the matter is precise: "Amid all these speculations, I think only one thing can be stated with very high confidence: physical death does not entail the end of consciousness, for consciousness is the fabric of all existence."[424]

I would add that the 'Otherworlds' are described as the real home, the real reality, more real than here. In NDEs and VTEs connection with others, telepathy and access to universal knowledge is often described. In generic NDEs a merging with The One is often described in mystical experiences such a merging has been described as merging with the One, as in Al Hallaj's well known 'blasphemous' exclamation, أنا الحَقيقة Ana Al-Haqq! (I am the Truth or God.)[425] If Kastrup tackles the reality of this Earth world, I find his approach useful to explain the descriptions in data about the afterlife. Whilst the Tibetan Buddhist descriptions and teachings come remarkably close to his approach, and the Mormon seem the opposite, the Mormon data can still be viewed from a Kastrupian perspective. Just as we have a shared view of

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[422] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 88.

[423] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 93-4.

[424] Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 88. Interestingly he says that a dead person might simply be a differentiated structure that no longer resonates with the patterns of vibration we call the empirical world. But it will still resonate with other patterns. The question, then, is whether a living person can, through non-ordinary states of consciousness, tune into the vibratory patterns put out by a deceased person. This doesn't seem impossible, though further speculation is only justified if there is enough empirical evidence to demonstrate that the phenomenon exists. Kastrup, Why *Materialism is Baloney,* 88.

[425] Mansour al-Hallaj (c. 858 – 26 March 922) Persia.

this world, so we can have a shared projection of the next. If bodies are 'projections' of mind, being without bodies does not really change the way consciousness operates. Now if as Kastrup says the Earth world is a projection might not also the heavenly Otherworlds be a projection? This is indeed the Tibetan claim. Kastrup's work takes a similar approach to Eastern non-dualism, such as the Direct Path ideas below. The main comment I have to make on these approaches is that while they are helpful in explaining NDEs, the NDEr seems to be in some sort of transitional state between the delusion of Earth and the clear non illusion of the enlightened state. The Otherworlds seem to be an intermediary position between the polarities discussed, in the sense that full universal consciousness is still not completely realized.

Modern Approaches and Voices

In this section I will discuss the latest voices in scholarship. As I write more and more books, both Mormon and generic, are being released on the topic of NDEs, as well as multiple narratives, videos and posts on social media: so many that it is hard to keep track and impossible to read and consider all of them! [426] Like so many others it lists topics such as Neuroscience, Biology, Abrahamic approaches to the afterlife, Folklore, metaphysics and of course the ubiquitous *Tibetan Book of the Dead*!

Given that Western approaches trying to explain VTEs and NDEs all have shortfalls I will now turn to look at Eastern approaches that might throw light on these mysterious phenomena from an alternative perspective. A step outside the box can be productive. If one browses the easy reading NDE sections of Amazon or YouTube videos and podcasts on Spotify

[426] For example: Jim Willis, *Near-Death Experiences : Afterlife Journeys and Revelations* (Visible Ink Press, 2024). -- Zion Media, "Mormon Near Death Experiences & Visitors From The Spirit World," Aug 8, 2024, https://youtu.be/Fr2GMkuolCo?si=kEOrinY8nlMbI46l.

stories about NDEs, alien abduction, past lives, physic predictions about the future world, and other paranormal subjects, abound with their own "folk theology," an impromptu mishmash of ideas drawn from various modern and historical themes. Across social media these ideas support and bolster each other and evolve. Most ordinary people are not researching academic journals on the NDE topic but engage these phenomena through their phones and laptops and online discourses, questions and answers ensue. As a result, common explanations and assumptions are heralded as truth, and a pseudo-canon of "doctrines" has emerged from common consent. Such New Age ideas are the idea of pre-existence, pre-birth contracts, soul families, free-will mixed with fate, a loving divine creator, angels, divine intervention on Earth, astral projection, dimensions with altered time and space, insights to future events, guides, and the experiential access to full knowledge, ranges of emotions and telepathic communication.

There is a spectrum across the expression of these ideas through Christian leaning towards the more free-thinking New Religions. I would argue that while the turn of the 1900s focused on spiritualism and séances, a century later the focus is on celebrity physics and NDEs. Both appeal to the general population and fill the vacuum left by the decline of formal Christianity with its traditional teachings on the afterlife and provide the thirst for information to those living in a disenchanted secular culture. Modern psychics are popular, and some have become celebrities, and spiritualism, ghost hunting and astrology. is still with us showing still vibrant cultural beliefs in the spirit world. The Scole experiments showed remarkable results challenging conventional wisdom.[427] Many books are published that appeal and seem to verify these ideas. There would not be room in this dissertation to even begin to give a literature review focused on these books and their wide scope of levels.

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[427] Grant Solomon, *Scole Experiment*.(Campion Books, 2012).

Some scholars have cleverly managed to bridge the gap between popular and academic publications, blending a thorough background in the history of philosophy and ideas, with an 'easy reading' style. Another genre are the big book complications drawing together diverse aspects of death, dying, NDEs and various afterlife scenarios.[428] One such popular author is Anthony Peake who challenges science and who champions the importance of recognizing the role of consciousness in forming our reality. In 2022, during the covid pandemic which aroused a great fear of death in society, he published *Cheating the Ferryman: the revolutionary science of life after death.* [429] This ambitious eclectic book is a precis of many themes all relating to the afterlife from the Perennial Philosophy, Eastern Religions, Quantum Physics, and the potted history of many intellectuals' ideas on the afterlife and consciousness. He is impressed by Eastern philosophies with clearly inform his approach and concludes that some sort of collective consciousness embraces us all, something related to Laszlo's Akashic Field.[430]

Jack Hunter is the editor of a recently published book named "Deep Weird: in which various scholars try to find explanations for 'High Strangeness Encounters,' which is the latest term for anomalous experiences.[431] The chapter on NDEs is written by Gregory Shushan and the foreword by Jeffrey J. Kripal. These are the voices for the 21st century tackling the mysteries of NDEs. His position that NDEs are 'Deeply Weird' is not controversial, even agnostics would

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[428] Moreman, *Routledge Companion to Death.* -- Kadagian, *Crossover Experience.* David Fontana, *Is There an Afterlife?* (O Books; NBN, 2005). P. M. H. Atwater, *Near-Death Experiences, the Rest of the Story: What They Teach Us About Living, Dying, and Our True Purpose*. (Hampton Roads, 2011). Robert Coppes, *Impressions of Near-Death Experiences: Quotations from over 100 Experiencers*. (IANDS Publications, 2023). Jim Willis, *Near-Death Experiences: Afterlife Journeys and Revelations* (Visible Ink Press, 2024).

[429] Anthony Peake, *Cheating the Ferryman: The Revolutionary Science of Life after Death.* (Arcturus Publishing Limited, 2022).

[430] Peake, *Cheating the Ferryman,* 246.

[431] Jeffrey J. Kripal, *Deep Weird: The Varieties of High Strangeness Experience*. (August Night Press, 2023). Jack Hunter, "Deep Weird: High Strangeness, Boggle Thresholds and Damned Data, Academic Research on Extraordinary Experience." *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience* 7, no. 1 (2021): 5-18.

agree there are strange events. The problem that critics would argue, is suggesting a supernatural cause rather than a natural one.

Jeffrey J. Kripal

Kripal simply states that these 'Deeply Weird' things happen and cannot be dismissed. He says stating they happen should come before hypothesizing explanations.[432] He reminds us of Plato's Cave, metaphor which itself is an explanation of the mirages we see. Kripal says after years of study he does not think academia can explain these events and he advises readers to accept the confusion and not look for definitive answers of truth. I believe this is good advice. Just accept the strange weirdness. Kripal has been a great influence on my own approach to these topics, ever since I discovered his writings on Gnosticism, esotericism, mysticism, the 'impossible' and all strange experiences.[433] Kripal represents the modern intellectual approach to all things paranormal and 'fringe' with a respected voice in the Academy.

His recent book the *Flip: Epiphanies of Mind and the Future of Knowledge* is both bold and pioneering and influenced my own position on the topic. Kripal, with ties to Easlen, carried the authority to challenge conventional thinking on the topic of NDEs. By "flip" he means a total reversal of perspective, which he argues is needed to bring about a 'new' worldview.[434] Let me emphasize that these ideas are held in ancient religions so resurrected worldview might be a better term. I challenge his suggestions that we need a 'new' worldview? He says it involves "*a new real* that is presently forming around the epiphany of mind as an irreducible dimension or

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[432] Kripal, *Deep Weird,* 1.

[433] This is Kripal's website: https://kripal.rice.edu/gem.html. Kripal, Flip. Kripal, Jeffrey J. *Authors of the Impossible: The Paranormal and the Sacred*. (University of Chicago Press, 2011). Kripal, Jeffrey J. *The Supernatural.* (Penguin Publishing Group, 2016).

[434] Wedges and bell bottoms are old fashion, but to a generation decades later who bring them back into fashion they might seem 'new'. What we think of as being new is often just old ideas and beliefs and fashions recycled and reintroduced.

substrate of the natural world, indeed of the entire cosmos."[435] The point is, as critics would point out, that many old philosophies, and Tibetan perspectives are already 'flipped.' *New*, might not be the best world for him to use, *revised* or *resurrected* might be better. I push back by suggesting that this is an ancient perspective that has been out of fashion in the West and ignored by science. This book recounts how many scientists have reversed their former materialistic ways of thinking and "flipped" into putting mind at the center of the universe. Consciousness, he argues, is the fundamental, not matter. May I point out that this is an Eastern idea. He discusses the philosophy of mind and possible ways to explain consciousness. [436] He also argues that academia is uncomfortable dealing with what he calls the many headed hydra of anomalous experience, and so they cut off those heads rather than dealing with them. [437] He reminds the reader that, "Science is a method, however, not a set of dogmas with which one can conflict,"[438] and I agree that science, like religion, is an evolving and changing process of ideas and should remain open to change and revision.

I agree with Kripal in general and admire his work and his insistence that we examine our assumptions and beliefs. He does not solve the mystery of the cause of NDEs but encouraging debate and exploration is vital. While NDEs do not fit the current paradigms does not mean they never will, and there is hope for the mysteries of all anomalous phenomena to be solved. Quantum physics and New Physics indeed do offer insightful ways of understanding the universe, and reports such as being out of time, having 360 vision, and telepathic

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[435] Kripal, *Flip,*12.

[436] Kripal, *Flip,* 109. He lists five approaches to the philosophy of mind. (1) panpsychism (2) dual-aspect monism, (3) quantum mind, (4) cosmopsychism, and (5) idealism.

[437] Kripal, *Flip,* 54.

[438] Kripal, *Flip,* 54.

communication[439] in NDEs might in the future be given some form of explanation. He cites scientists and scholars who have made 'the flip' such as the now famous neurosurgeon and author Eben Alexander M.D.[440] Alexander in his own NDE experienced "a world of consciousness that existed *completely free of the limitations of my physical brain.*"[441] Other 'flipped' intellectuals includes Marjorie Hines Woollacott[442] who was impressed by the Hindu notion that everything is composed of consciousness or *chit which manifests in the physical world as vibratory energy or spanda.* She then embraced panentheism and held that mind creates matter, which is one approach to explain the mind/body problem.[443]

Canadian neurobiologist Mario Beauregard 'flipped' and suggested that the brain is in fact a transmitter and not the producer of consciousness after his own spiritual experience in 1987.[444] Lastly Marshall mentions the experiences that made the atheistic logical positivist Alfred Jules Ayer question his lifelong approach to religion.[445] Kripal asserts that in mystical literature, "we find here the most extreme and the most telling examples of reflexivity, of consciousness knowing itself as and through itself. This is where the mirror turns back on itself, stops reflecting objects and egos and comes to know itself not in the mirror but *as the mirror*."[446] He raises an important idea of the links between humans on this Earth and whatever is on the

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[439] See Roger Luckhurst, *The Invention of Telepathy, 1870-1901*. (Oxford University Press, 2002). The term 'telepathy' was coined by Frederic Myers, founder of the Society for Psychical research, in 1882. -- Myers, F. W. H., and Richard Hodgson. *Human Personality and Its Survival of Bodily Death*. (Longmans, Green, and Co., 1903).

[440] Eben Alexander, *Proof of Heaven: A Neurosurgeon's Journey into the Afterlife* (Simon & Schuster; 2012). Eben Alexander, *The Map of Heaven: How Science, Religion, and Ordinary People Are Proving the Afterlife* (Simon & Schuster; 2014).

[441] Kripal, *Flip*, 67.

[442] Barbara Ehrenreich, *Living with a Wild God: A Nonbeliever's Search for the Truth about Everything* (New York: Twelve, 2015), xii–xiii. -- Marjorie Hines Woollacott, *Infinite Awareness: The Awakening of a Scientific Mind* (Lanham, MD, Rowaman & Littlefield, 2015).

[443] Kripal, *Flip,* 79-81.

[444] Kripal, *Flip,* 84 & Mario Beauregard, and Denyse O'Leary. *The Spiritual Brain: A Neuroscientist's Case for the Existence of the Soul*. 1st ed. (HarperOne, 2007).

[445] A. J. Ayer, "What I Saw When I Was Dead," *Sunday Telegraph*, August 28, 1988.

[446] Kripal, *Flip,* 163.

other side, not only is it a 'microcosm- macrocosm', but a relationship and deep connection between the two rather than a polarity. It is the idea that we come and return from something greater than ourselves whether this is from a personal deity and His environs, or from an impersonal universe grounded in the *Dharmakaya.*

Kripal questions the materialist model of the universe, arguing it is not a fact, but only one of many interpretations of reality, and he adds that this is so because science cannot measure consciousness which is both invisible and elusive.[447] The only solution is that instead of resting all knowledge on observation we allow for first person awareness and even collective witness.[448] I agree, and in the case of NDEs, while one NDE, such as the famous Pam Reynolds case,[449] might seem convincing but cannot convince the skeptics. It might be in the full number of collective reports, all the circumstantial and cumulative evidence that eventually turns the tide and leads to more credibility. Kripal suggests that "What we need is a new way of knowing, a new metaphysical imagination that does not confuse what we can observe in the third person with all there is." [450] I agree change is welcome, but I challenge his insistence on using 'new' as an adjective to describe this way of knowing because it ignores the ancients' ideas. When pondering upon Kripal's position It occurred to me that just as science is based on observation, so religious experience is based on personal observation and experience. The difference is that I can show a rock to a colleague, but I cannot share a spiritual experience, unless it is a SDE. Science is objective and NDEs are subjective. This makes NDEs very difficult to examine and

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[447] Kripal, *Flip,* 105-6.
[448] Kripal, *Flip,* 107.
[449] See Leslie. *Surviving Death: A Journalist Investigates Evidence for an Afterlife.* (Crown, 2018),100.
[450] Kripal, *Flip,* 107.

explain. They fall outside the perimeter of science, and this is why they are sidelined and relegated to the area of 'religion".

Paul Marshall

Paul Marshall, another modern thinker, asks us what mystical experiences tell us about ourselves, not just about reality.[451] He focuses on extrovertive mystical experiences that contain elements such as feelings of deep knowledge, altered time, light bliss and love, which also are components of NDEs. While VTEs are not always ultra mystical in the unitive sense, like all NDEs there are components of mysticism.[452] When studying VTEs and NDEs and Tibetan mystical experiences the urge is to focus on 'the otherside' but in fact it is a chance to look at ourselves and what our experiences tell us about our personalities, beliefs, and perspectives. He comes up with the idea of classical, premodern and modern NDEs which is a useful tool for considering these experiences,[453] especially since both the Mormon and Tibetan experiences in this dissertation refer to older experiences. Marshall suggests that "embodiment ordinarily imposes limitations on consciousness. The idea that perceptions are restricted by the 'Veil of flesh'", and idea raised in the explanations of NDEs.[454] In reply I agree that according to VTE and NDE reports the experiencer expands and has a greater freedom outside of the regular body. There is no current explanation however of why this is so, other than the philosophical theories of consciousness I have discussed.

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[451] Paul Marshall, *The Living Mirror: Images of Reality in Science and Mysticism.* Rev. ed. (Samphire, 2006), vii- viii. Paul Marshall, *The Shape of the Soul: What Mystical Experience Tells Us About Ourselves and Reality.* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

[452] Paul Marshall, *Mystical Encounters with the Natural World: Experiences and Explanations.* (OUP Oxford, 2005), Preface.

[453] Marshall, *Mystical Encounters*, 111-126.

[454] Marshall, *Mystical Encounters*, 12-13.

Marshall's observations of transformative spiritual experiences are listed as seeing another world, having no pain, having a new spatial orientation and time, having a second facet of self, seeing figures of light, awareness of other lives, and the connection of everything to a great mind in agreement with idealism.[455] While this list does not fit all VTEs or NDEs it is in agreement with other attempts to categorize these spiritual experiences. His explanation for NDEs and other mystical experiences comes down to consciousness as the underlying factor.[456]

P.M.H. Atwater

Let me close up the Western section with a mention of one of the most prolific writers, author of over twenty books, the NDEr, P.M.H. Atwater who had an experience which she later recognized when reading about the work of Roger Penrose. In her own NDE in 1977 she left her body and went through her roof, seeing the atoms in it as she passed through. She rose in the sky and entered a field of light. She spied two colossal cyclonic vortexes, like an hourglass shape, the top and bottom spinning in opposite directions. I the top part she saw images of herself in all her past lives. She also saw all her future lives. She saw other people near her and the same was happening to them. This was like a hologram, or a perceptual illusion outside to time. She was connected to all other in a web of light threads.[457] The bottom part of the torus was a mirror image of the top, and the place where each joined, she knew was a space where God could be found., which she calls the 'centerpoint'. She realized she came from God and wanted to return there. Later she discovered that her vision matched the toroidal field vortexes sketches of Roger

[455] Marshall, *Mystical Encounters*, 41-44.
[456] Marshall, *Mystical Encounters*, 145-175.
[457] Atwater, P. M. H. *Future Memory*. (Hampton Roads Publishing, 2013),133-135.

Penrose, which he used to describe time, space, and matter.[458] This experience gave her a personal insight into how time works in NDEs.

She discusses the topic of reality shifts and future memory phenomenon. She notes illusions of perception and discusses living in time and space differently in NDEs. She slipped through what appeared to be solid and real, then she encountered the truth. [459] Enlightenment is ongoing and not a plateau we achieve it is just a shift in consciousness.[460] consciousness is non-local and a field effect. [461]The 'future' is just an aspect of Earth life. There are dimensions of experience without number and realms of spirit without end. The Great Thought (Consciousness or God. The Absolute) is defined by LOVE.[462] Taking her insight from her experience at face value I can understand how many descriptions in NDEs, and Mormon experiences of the Spirit World are consciousness shifts and how past, present, and future can be accessed. Her experiences would not be accepted as real by science, however physicists such as Hoffman might suggest or study various explanations.

(d) Eastern Types of Explanations

Until now in this chapter I have discussed Western explanations and while many are helpful in understanding NDEs they seem incomplete. I believe that Eastern approaches help contribute to a more complete understanding. Having input from other cultures and religions is imperative if the universal fact of death, and survival after death, is to be thoroughly appreciated. Many Eastern Ideas have inspired Westerners and hybrid East-West philosophies have emerged

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[458] Atwater, *Future Memory*, 140.
[459] Atwater, *Future Memory*, 226.
[460] Atwater, *Future Memory*, 231.
[461] Atwater, *Future Memory*, 194.
[462] Atwater, *Future Memory*, 226.

in the last century. In this section I will discuss Hindu Approaches such as Advaita Vedanta Rupert Spira and the Direct Path. The limitations of current and past Western academic conversations about NDEs, altered states and consciousness and the history of West-Eastern cultural and spiritual exchange in the last three hundred years. The tendency to look elsewhere for answers and to the East is not new but dates back to antiquity. Consider the ancient Greek expansion into Asia as far as China, and then the more recent co-mingling of ideas resulting from increased movement and communication, reflected in Orientalism and then the 'hippy' counterculture movement of the 60's. Western scholars' access to Eastern texts and religious attitudes has increased since the 1700s.

Schopenhauer is an example of one of the earliest Western academics to investigate Hinduism and Buddhism, spurred by his own rejection of traditional Christian values and beliefs. Do Eastern explanations of the afterlife have something to offer in this confusion? There is no denying the controversy and disagreements between scientific and religious explanations of NDEs in the West. Approached from various Western based perspectives and mindsets that inherit ways of looking at minds and bodies, the general result is that neither side listen to the other and polarity in opinions divides the believers from the disbelievers, with all manner of skepticism in between. Explanations of NDEs and similar anomalous experiences come from many opposing camps…. all contain truth and error. This explains the limitations in this comparative section. Could looking outside this Western approach and taking a look at Eastern perspectives help one understand the NDE phenomenon? Many groups, institutions and scholars just ignore all the work done of hundreds of years in India and Tibet to understand the psyche and the Otherworlds. I argue that to understand the human psyche and spirituality one has to study what non-Western cultures have offered in terms of the exploration of the human mind and

the afterlife. Standing outside the box I believe might help answer hitherto unanswered questions.

Eastern approaches are exemplified by: Yogacara, Advaita Vedanta, Rupert Spira and the Direct Path which use techniques to access higher dimensions of consciousness through meditation and breathing techniques. In my own theory, I think that the Otherworlds can be accessed through various modes such as NDEs, religious visions, prayer, psychedelics, and other psi methods, but the Eastern approach is more holistic, using meditation as a way to achieve an altered state of consciousness.

The historical context

The theosophical movement is just one strand of the fruitful spiritual East-West dialogue in the 19th century facilitated by the British Raj, and the opportunities for exploration in such cross-cultural exchanges. Figures such as Mme. Blavatsky, Alexandra David Neel, Anagarika Govinda (aka Ernst Lothar Hoffman) and Arthur Avalon (aka Sir John Woodruffe) helped bring Eastern ideas to the West. One lesser-known figure who explored Eastern and Egyptian mysticism was Dr. Paul Brunton aka Raphael Hurst (1898-1981). Paul, a student of Ramana Maharishi, spent a night inside the Great Pyramid in Giza, Egypt in the mid-1930s and inside had a NDE like mystical experience, which included autoscopy and learning the truth that humans are eternal spirit beings, immortal souls full of consciousness that can communicate telepathically and surpass matter in this form. During this night inside the King's Chamber alone, he had a religious experience of spiritual liberation once freed from his physical body. He wrote, "This is the state of death. Now that I know that I am a soul, that I can exist apart from the

body."[463] He realized that his Earthly body was not his real self, and that death is not annihilation. Now I discovered that the renowned psychologist Kenneth Ring is one of the only NDE researchers that authored a paper on Brunton. His article, published in Anabiosis in 1984, found a parallel in the sense of self felt by both Brunton and NDErs. He argues that Brunton's idea of the 'overself', describes the sense of self that is described in NDE testimonies. He had anticipated the findings Ring and others had discovered in the study of NDEs decades later.[464] Ring states, "Paul Brunton's exultant cry of his liberation from death is of course now the common testimony of countless NDErs who have made the same temporary crossing that Brunton did fifty years ago." [465] I would argue that here is a cultural bridge, for Brunton developed spiritually in an Indian, Hindu setting and yet his experience is somewhat universal as far as the aspect of personal identity goes.

In the late 19th century Swami Vivekananda (1863-1902) brought his Vedanta school west and introduced it to Americans at the 1893 Parliament of Religions. In the early 20th century Paramhamsa Yogananda (1893-1952)[466] who settled in California, founded the Self Realization Fellowship, and taught Kriya Yoga. In the 60's more gurus from India came west offering a "new spiritual vision" [467], and in the 1950's as the Chinese government advanced its influence into Tibet, monks, including the Dalai Lama XIV and other important figures fled, and set up centers in exile in Dharamshala in other towns in India. This flow of spirituality to the West not only stimulated new religious movements, but it is related to the study of NDEs. This is because

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[463] Paul Brunton, *A Search in Secret Egypt*. (Arrow Books, 1965),72-73. (1st published 1935).

[464] Kenneth Ring, "The Nature of Personal Identity in the Near-Death Experience: Paul Brunton and the Ancient Tradition," *Anabiosis, The Journal for Near-Death Studies.* vol.4 no.1. Spring. (1984): 3-20.

[465] Ring, The Nature of Personal Identity, 15.

[466] Incidentally Yogananda met with Ramana Maharishi, as did Paul Brunton! Rupert Spira also studied Maharishi's writings.

[467] This is new perhaps to some in the West, but it is taken from an ancient tradition that is not new.

the topic of visions linked to deathbed situations and out of body experiences were nothing new and well documented and studied in these traditions. Both Hindu and Buddhist traditions had studied and tried to explain and philosophize the cycle of birth and death, the working of the human mind, the relationship of mind to body, consciousness, and the *siddhis*,[468] or supernatural powers and occurrences in a spiritual setting.

While there are numerous Hindu approaches and philosophies the one that I find has most relevance to understanding and explaining NDEs and anomalous experiences belong to the Neo-Vedanta school which emerged from Advaita Vedanta, the tradition of Vivekananda, Sri Aurobindo and Sarvepalli Radhakri) and which here is the West is represented in an evolved form by Jean Klein (1912-1998) and then his student Francis Lucille (1944-) and later his student Rupert Spira (1960-). Their Direct Path teachings are linked to the non-dualist Kashmir Shaivism which in turn, since it comes from the far north of the subcontinent, shares origins and many concepts with Vajrayana Buddhism, and Dzogchen especially, which is also a form of Tantra.

Tibetan Buddhism and Hinduism are not divorced or separate but developed more like branches from the same tree and the free flowing of ideas throughout the centuries have brought them into many points of contact such as shared deities and similar philosophical ideas and ritual practices. The Direct Path is an East-West mélange of Hindu based non-duality philosophies.[469] Advaita Vedanta is an Indian school linked to the teacher Shankara. *Brahman*, as pure

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[468] Siddhis are the Indian equivalent of psi phenomenon. I have witnessed Tibetan magic in a healing ritual setting. A Lama inserted a Phurba knife into his mouth and then touched the skin of those present with it leaving burn marks on their necks as part of the healing ceremony. Then he heated oil in a handheld glass jug whilst infusing healing energy into it. This is unexplainable! This sacred oil is reputed to cure all illnesses.

[469] It is based on Advaita Vedanta and also shows the influence of Kashmiri Shaivism, and Tantric ideas. Hence the similarities with Tibetan Buddhism which shares similar Indian roots. Kashmir is in the north of the subcontinent of India and close to Tibet.

consciousness underlies all reality, and plurality arises from confusion. The world we experience is an illusion or maya and it is not independent but depends on *Brahman*. *Brahman* has two forms, *nirguna* Brahman, the ultimate without qualities and known only to itself, and *saguna Brahman* which is the form that manifests as *ishvara* or a deity with qualities. *Ishvara*, a personal Lord, can be experienced in the world. The world is experienced, but it is not as it appears, and not real in that sense of being like a mirage.

This philosophy is represented in the West by many gurus and teachers. Robert Adams (1928-1997) met Paramahansa Yogananda (1893-1953), leader of the Self-Realization Fellowship in Southern California but was directed by him to find Sri Ramana Maharshi, prompting Adams to fly to India to study under this guru. Adams repeated the famous analogy of the clay pot.

> You're like a clay pot. A clay pot has space inside of it and outside of it. The space inside is not any different than the space outside. When the clay pot breaks, the space merges with inside and the outside. It's only one space. So, it is with us. Your body is like a clay pot, and it appears you have to go within to find the truth. The outward appears to be within you. The outward is also without you. There's boundless space.[470]

He also used the analogy of the *atman* being the bubble in the ocean of Brahman, a common analogy, also used by Yogananda in his song from the Cosmic Chants collection, 'I am the bubble, make me the sea.'[471]

The explanations of NDEs we have considered so far come from a Western view. Western culture usually assumes the Christian framework of defining a human as a body with an inner self or soul. Then when atheism and science became the leading paradigm, the spirit or soul

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[470] Robert Adams, *Satsangs. The Collected Works*. (Published by author, 1993), 2325.

[471] Ananda Sangha Worldwide, "I Am the Bubble, Make Me the Sea (Chant by P. Yogananda)," August 22, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QDNnKhvT-gY.

was sent to the area of religion and psychology and all that was left was the body, which vanishes after death, leaving nothing remaining of the individual except historical memory. The Western timeline is linear, and, in its religions, this gives a linear afterlife with an End of Times scenario. NDErs however do not report in such linear ways when they report that they are outside space and time. Some non-Mormon NDEs suggest reincarnation as a soul choice. Reincarnation is part of a circular timeline perspective, as found in Eastern religions. Not only do Eastern religions share a different time/space cosmology, but they also have a different idea about that makes up bodies, souls, and minds.

The Hindu philosophical schools might vary philosophically but most accept a basic view of the body and mind as being composed of sheaths, not all of which are visible or tangible. The Western idea of a body corresponds to the Indian idea of the gross body, or *sthula sharira*. However, there are two more bodies, the causal *karana sharira*, which carries the karmic seed and the subtle body or Sukshma sharira which contains the vital energy and mind. Upon death the *jiva* or soul transmigrates with the causal and subtle body. The *atman* is covered by five sheaths called *koshas*. The gross body is linked to food sheath (*annamaya kosha*), and the innermost sheath is the *anandamaya kosha*, or bliss sheath which is the atman.[472] The subtle body is linked to three koshas, energy, mind and discernment of knowledge sheaths (*Pranamaya* Kosha, *Manomaya* Kosha and *Vijnanamaya* Kosha.) [473] The Pranamaya refers to *prana*, the life force energy. There is no good work for this in English, but it is the life force energy we witness in a breathing person that seems to vanish when breathing stops. It is similar to the Semitic ideas

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[472] This level is only attained in deep sleep, and in samadhi. See https://swarajyamag.com/culture/the-meeting-of-vedic-philosophy-and-cognitive-science. https://swarajyamag.com/culture/understanding-the-vedic-model-of-the-mind.

[473] *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2.1-5)/

of Ruh (الروح) or ruach (רוּחַ) which mean breath or wind, life, or spirit, but which carries the connotation that breath is linked to life force energy.

Tibetan Buddhism speaks also of pranic *Lung* (Tibetan: རླུང་ *rlung*) winds in the body which are a metaphor of mind. These travel through the nadi channels of the subtle body. During an empowerment, after instruction, the student receives a 'lung transmission' from the Lama. Why this is important is that NDErs report not just that their minds and thinking are intact, but their vital life force energy survives death and even survives the cessation of breath. Hindu philosophies also have five definitions of mind, namely manas, ahamkara, *citta*, *buddhi* and *atman*. *(manas*, the everyday awake mind for perception memory and reasoning – *ahamkara* the false ego and out deluded sense of identity and self - *buddhi*, the intellect and moral choice maker – *chitta,* the subconscious mind and memory storage house, -- *atman* the true self part and a spark of all consciousness) Therefore a Hindu explanation of an NDE is that the subtle and causal body, the jiva, abandon the gross body and enter the *preta* realm of ancestral ghosts from where the soul migrates into one of fourteen *lokas* or realms. e.g., perhaps the heavenly *svarg* realm or Earth *bhuloka*. The goal is to become aware of the ahamkara false ego and cling to the true self. As I read about these ideas of what constitutes a person and life force, I remember what scientists and psychologists in the Weast have proposed and what academics have speculated about consciousness. I do find a sort of agreement in the ideas of continued consciousness.

Now this is a far more complicated system that the two aspect Western model, but it is more helpful is explaining what NDErs experience. Their increased insight about the composition of their true self, and their unhindered abilities outside the body, correspond with the Indian perspective. Also, the different realms experienced by NDErs correspond with the Hindu idea of multiplicity. I am not arguing that they see Hindu *lokas*, I am arguing that Hindus

suggested a multiplicity of possible afterlives and that multiplicity is the key word here. NDErs experience Spirit World, Spirit Prison, various kinds of heaven, hellish or void dark regions and other realms. The Hindy perspective accepts the non-locality that some Westerners and scientists purport and what NDErs describe. In this dissertation I am only concentrating on the Direct Path idea of what a self is and its identity and eternal destiny.

These non-dual teachings simplify the story to deluded being on Earth to liberated being in source consciousness, or the journey from being (or appearing to be) an embodied atman on Earth to liberation in absorption with brahman. Remember that the Direct Path fits into this wider Hindu cosmology, even if Spira and others do not mention this background. [474]

The Direct Path

Jean Klein (1912 -1998)[475] and his disciples Francis Lucille, Greg Goode and then Rupert Spira represent a philosophical movement called the Direct Path which espouses non-duality in the lineage of Atmananda Krishnamenon and Ramana Maharshi. Both Frenchmen, Klein and Lucille come from an Advaita Vedanta Hindu lineage. Klein's guru was Pandit Veeraraghavachar from Bangalore, and he later studied Kashmir Shaivism. [476] Lucille's books often direct the read to approach non-duality through art, poetry and music because perhaps the ineffable is best approached this way, but this also follows the Indian tradition of art carrying the tradition and expressing divinity in darshan, more than text, which is the Western focus.[477] In the

[474] Tibetan Buddhism has some of its roots in Hinduism and shares similarly complex ideas about Lokas and koshas, albeit with a slight doctrinal variance evolved through time. E.g. *atman* versus *anatman.*

[475] Jean Klein's guru, Pandit Veeraraghavachar, was a Professor at the Sanskrit College in Bangalore.

[476] Jean Klein, *Who am I? The Sacred Quest*. (New Harbinger Publications, 2006). Jean Klein, *Ease of Being* (Non-Duality Books, 2020).

[477] Incidentally, Rupert Spira is an artist. He specializes in pottery.

Direct Path [478]receiving knowledge from one's guru is emphasized.[479] It is similar to but not identical to the teachings of Advaita Vedanta [480] and Sri Ramana Maharishi which puts more emphasis on meditation as a path to knowledge that leads to a traditional Hindu idea of liberation or *moksha*. On the other hand, the emphasis of the Direct Path is on understanding that 'you' are not your body, mind, or world, but that 'you' and the apparent world are consciousness.

Both Advaita Vedanta and the Direct Path hold that one's essential nature is consciousness, immortal and limitless, and that the world is an illusion, but the difference is what one does when one has realized the non-duality of *Atman/Brahman*. While Advaita Vedanta would encourage always looking within, after looking within, the Direct Path encourages looking again outwards at objective experience as a way to integrate the post achievement of *sat- chit-ananda*.[481] Francis Lucille still teaches in Southern California, for those who can afford the weekends in luxury surroundings! There is stress on meditation in the moment, now. Attention should be directed to the reality of your experience and divorce this from perceptions coming from the outside world. Deeper thought, he argues, shows that the intuition of reality is direct, with or without the presence of objects. It will be clear that mind is real, and body is a phenomenon. The advice is to let go of all perceptions, attachments. He uses the analogy of a movie on a screen, in which the mind is like the movie and the world is the screen on which the movie is projected. We cannot find the screen in the movie. Images are projected onto the screen,

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[478] The inference is a direct path to liberation.

[479] Lineage of authority is also important amongst Mormons and Tibetan Buddhists.

[480] Advaita is a Sanskrit word that literally means "not two". Liberation is realizing this non-duality. For more on this philosophical school see: -- Timalsina, Sthaneshwar. *Consciousness in Indian Philosophy : The Advaita Doctrine of 'Awareness Only'*. (Routledge, 2009).

[481] Translated as 'being, consciousness and bliss' or enlightenment.

but we are caught in the illusion of the movie. He explains that consciousness, perception, and the reality of the perception are One.[482]

I am going to paraphrase and simplify Lucille's profound non-duality teachings. Most of us think that we are our body and minds, and we have an inner narrative and memory of our life, and we identify with this. Even our documents and qualifications and educational and medical records ae attached to our identity. The Direct Path tells us to stop, think and question these seemingly logical and natural assumptions. Francis Lucille speaks about one thing: awareness, our true nature, the Absolute. This is the ancient teaching of nonduality, the common ground of Advaita Vedanta. He leads us to a deep understanding that what we are is love, the pure awareness behind and between all the activities of the mind. We are the observer, the subjective witness, the awareness when we open our eyes and look at the world and we associate this with our personal identity. We fail to realize that we are the limitless 'I AM,' although in moments of concentrated meditation we can get a glimpse of this aspect of consciousness, which is also our true nature. The glimpse of this is like perfume, it is blissful, non-local and timeless.[483] The ego is impermanent. Lucille teaches us to free our attention from perceptions. When you are moved by the beauty of a piece of music, by the splendor of a sunset, or by the delicacy of an act of love, the ego leaves you. In that moment you are open and complete. During these moments, the ego is not present. They emanate from our true being, which is joy itself.[484] Lucille teaches that the body/mind/world changes constantly - a thought is replaced by a bodily sensation which is replaced by a sense perception.

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[482] Stillness Speaks. "Self Realization Resource: Teachers, Traditions, & More - Stillness Speaks," January 5, 2024. https://www.stillnessspeaks.com/. Francis Lucille, The Reality of Experience, (Published by author, 2008).

[483] Lucille, Francis, and Alan Epstein. *Eternity Now*. (Non-Duality Press, 2009), 1-2.

[484] Lucille, *Eternity Now*, 11.

Behind all of these there is the constant presence of consciousness, which we refer to as reality. Consciousness and reality are the same. We live in both dimensions of consciousness and the world – consciousness or God's mind and the world/universe or God's body. If the body/mind/world vanish what is left is consciousness. Consciousness knows itself with or without objects. [485] There is a sense of separation between me and not me which comes from my belief that I am a person, and this belief is attached to emotions and concepts that lead to discord and prevents finding truth love and beauty.[486]

How do his teachings explain NDEs? They explain some of the timelessness and differences in surroundings in NDEs, the access to knowledge and telepathy. The conventional conception of telepathy is explained as two separated minds sharing thoughts by some unseen signal or connection. From his position, this is the wrong way to think about it because there is no separation between two minds as is assumed. It is not one mind communicating to another mind. It is all one mind sharing thoughts. Lucille's teaching, though appearing theoretical, is based on his own personal spiritual awakening experience. He had his own spiritual experience of blissful non-duality when listening to the *Gayatri* mantra. [487]At that moment, when he identified with the field of consciousness he awoke to his eternity. The implication is that there is no death. This means that awareness in the NDE and in the Bardos might be in a different state and not in the human Earthly body, but still alive, more alive than those on Earth.[488] Of course the Direct Path has its critics. It is a religious position and those of differing religious positions or

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[485] Lucille, Francis. *Truth Love Beauty.* (Truespeech Productions, 2006), 3.

[486] Lucille, *Truth Love Beauty,* 40.

[487] *The Gayatri Mantra* also known as the Sāvitrī Mantra is a sacred mantra from the Rig Veda dedicated to the Vedic goddess Gayatri wife of Lord Brahma.

[488] Paula Marvelly, *The Teachers of One: Living Advaita: Conversations on the Nature of Non-Duality*. (Watkins Pub., 2002), 62.

no religious positions might not agree with this Eastern perspective. Lucille has a cohesive worldview which might be one way to explain consciousness and NDEs, but it is quite theoretical and not easy for everyone to grasp.

Greg Good is easier to understand, when he says the goal of the Direct Path is to recognize yourself as awareness beauty and love, not as a person with these attributes, but as the qualities themselves and he adds that "awareness is prior to the person and not possessed by the person." [489] He simplifies Lucille's cryptic movie-screen analogy by simply stating that we are awareness itself, not a body-mind combination. In other words, we are 'just being', not 'being something' (like a human).[490] For Goode witnessing awareness is consciousness connected to individuality.[491] If this is applied to NDEs and the afterlife, the descriptions are 'witnessed' and felt as if they are happening to an 'ego-person', even in the case of the Tibetan Bardo where the goals is to release to illusion of one's ego. This is not contradictory, indeed the fact that NDEs and Bardos talk about a witnessing ego, means that the person is still on the spiritual journey and not liberated. As for Western experiences, the renunciation of personhood is not required. On the other hand, the permeability of objects for the 'spirit body' in an OBE, such as reports of the NDER walking through hospital walls leads credence to the idea that this world is not as solid as it appears to humans. An aspect of maya perhaps! While VTE's do not feature the person merging into the divine, in mystical and other generic NDEs, the reports of merging with 'the light' could be interpreted with the *atman* entering *brahman*. Indeed, Goode challenges the typical materialist assumption that a solid world and only that exists, his philosophy is a polar

[489] Greg Goode, *The Direct Path: A User Guide*. (New Harbinger Publications, 2012), 19.
[490] Goode, *Direct Path,* 20.
[491] Goode, *Direct Path,* 27.

opposite, only mind exists. Again, it is hard to challenge a religious belief system on grounds of truth. Acceptance of the Direct Path position rests on faith.

Rupert Spira

Rupert Spira (1960-) is a British artist and perhaps the most famous of the modern teacher of the Direct Path.[492] He is author of several books including, *The Nature of Consciousness* (2017) [493]*Being Aware of Being Aware* (2017)[494], *The Transparency of Things* (2016),[495] *Presence Vol. 1 The Art of Peace and Happiness*[496] and *Vol. 2 The Intimacy of all Experience.* (2016)[497]. He also co-authored a book with his mentor Lucille called *Perfume of Silence*.[498] His YouTube channel[499] and website[500] contain scores of video teaching sessions which follow the traditional pattern of a teacher answering questions from the audience of students. Although there are several Western branches of Advaita transmission in the U.K and U.S.A. Spira draws from the oral tradition of Sri Atmananda Krishna Menon,[501]Jean Klein[502] and

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[492] Recommended websites: http://www.advaita.org.uk/teachers/teachers.htm. http://www.advaita.org.uk/teachers/direct_path.htm.

[493] Spira, Rupert. *The Nature of Consciousness: Essays on the Unity of Mind and Matter*. (Sahaja Publications; New Harbinger Publications, 2017).

[494] Spira, Rupert. *Being Aware of Being Aware*. (Sahaja, 2017).

[495] Spira, Rupert. *The Transparency of Things: Contemplating the Nature of Experience*. Second edition. (Sahaja; New Harbinger Publications, 2016).

[496] Spira, Rupert, and John J. Prendergast. *Presence, Volume I: The Art of Peace and Happiness*. 2nd ed. (New Harbinger Publications, 2016).

[497] Spira, Rupert, and John J. Prendergast. *Presence, Volume II: The Intimacy of All Experience*. 2nd ed. (New Harbinger Publications, 2016).

[498] Lucille, Francis, and Rupert Spira. *Perfume of Silence*. (Truespeech Prod., 2006).

[499] See Spira's YouTube channel here: https://www.youtube.com/user/rupertspira.

[500] See Spira's website here: https://non-duality.rupertspira.com/home.

[501] "Atmananda Krishna Menon - Stillness Speaks," Stillness Speaks, November 15, 2019, https://www.stillnessspeaks.com/teacher/atmananda-krishna-menon/.

[502] "Jean Klein - Stillness Speaks," Stillness Speaks, November 15,2019, https://www.stillnessspeaks.com/teacher/jean-klein/.

Francis Lucille. [503]. He also practices a form of Kashmir Shaivism, classified as a Tantric tradition which brings its practice into proximity with Vajrayana.[504]

Rupert Spira is gifted in the art of eloquence and is able to explain in simple terms the most complex and counter-intuitive concepts about reality, consciousness, mind, and Absolute Being. The most typical interpretations of NDEs fall into dualist categories, those which separate mind from matter. The typical assumptions behind analysis of NDEs is that milestones such as birth and death exist, time proceeds in a linear manner, that this material planet and the universe is physically solid and 'real,' and that any afterlife is either a non-existent fantasy or else belongs to another invisible dimension. However, after listening to Spira's lectures such assumptions are challenged and it becomes possible to see NDEs in a new light. His approach provides one possible solution for some of the anomalies and contradictions that occur with comparison of various NDEs. For example, critics point out that the descriptions of NDEs vary widely and they ask why is this so, if we supposed afterlife is a 'real place' that everyone goes to? Why do NDErs not see the same 'heaven,' despite experiencing similar patterns?

Spira's philosophy allows for multiplicity of experiences, and his position explains how NDErs have a customized experience relevant to them. Jeffrey Long[505] agrees with him suggesting that NDErs play a role in self-creating their own NDE experiences. Even Mormon NDEs, which tend to be very dualistic, can be better understood from Spira's nondual perspective when it comes to the doctrine of apotheosis, that humans can become gods, and contain the spark of divinity, for as he teaches humans are after all the consciousness of the absolute in finite form. Main theme's in Spira's teachings: While the main goal of Spira's

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[503] https://advaitachannel.francislucille.com/en/home/.
[504] https://iep.utm.edu/kashmiri/.
[505] https://youtu.be/RfOGrMfcMPg?si=M3yLk3fV8l_FtYb3.

teaching is aimed at spiritual progress the foundation for the path is a proper understanding of consciousness and the 'self.'

Many of Spira's teachings are relevant to the topic of death and the afterlife. (i) *Death and the Idea of the Material Body* [506] Infinite Consciousness has billions of precipitations at the same time. A river can have many whirlpools. Each precipitation is made of the same stuff…each collapse or is a localization of the same infinite field…it is one field. This single field of consciousness precipitates as the finite mind in order to experience form. The same or similar information can appear in two or more finite minds. We are all informed from the same source. If there are eighty people/finite minds here and this room appears to each of them…. We all draw similar information from the collective field and all experience the same room. When someone dies that particular appearance disappears before other finite minds. We never experience a body made out of matter. An image can disappear out of the mind, but we never experience an object/ or a dead body made out of matter. There is nothing outside the mind and there is no such thing as matter. Materialism states that matter was here first.

Consciousness is a derivative of matter.[507] However, our experience is the opposite of this, and it tells us that consciousness is first, mind is a localization of consciousness and what we call matter appears in mind. When consciousness narrows its focus, "matter" comes into existence. When it broadens its focus out of the waking state into the dream state matter disappears. When someone dies, they stop appearing in our awareness.[508] Our experience is not

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[506] Rupert Spira, "Death and the Idea of Material Body," February 6, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W0aYfI8TDsI.

[507] Definitions: many different writers use terms such as consciousness, mind, body, soul, intellect etc. It is important to note that although the same words are used by different writers and traditions, they may not mean the same things. e.g. Mind in Vedanta is slightly different from mind as used in Western traditions.

[508] Rupert Spira, "What Happens to Awareness After Death?" February 13, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KwRDCj2Qgyw.

illusory, our experience is real. But to believe that the world is made out of stuff called matter is an illusion.

In another work, *(ii) Time and Death* [509] he examines the concept of time and eternity. In *(iii) Exploring the Fear of Dissolution or Death*. [510] he addresses the fear of disappearing at death. He argues that it is as simple as going to sleep and that since we are eternal there should be no fear. He denies the reality of death. People of other religious persuasions, who might not agree with his complete position, might agree with the argument that we are immortal and that we ought not fear death because it is not the end. However, many religions, especially Islam and many denominations of Christianity, embrace the gulf between human and Divine, and the dependence of humans on Divine mercy and forgiveness. So, while it is fascinating to listen to Spira and his arguments are consistent and logical, they might not always be convincing to those of a different worldview.

In The Art of Peace and Happiness, Spira discusses our true nature, the origin of a notion of a separate self, the body, the world, and experience. Who am I? The sense of being a separate self is an illusion. We forget our essential being. We are simply being and awareness. We are aware presence. His position is that Self is Birthless and Deathless: "The self that we seem to have become as a result of the forgetting or Veiling of our essential being is an imaginary one. It is in fact a *thought*, not an entity or a self, which has caused this exclusive association of our self with an object of the body and mind."[511] His position is similar to the Tibetan argument that ego identity and the world is an illusion (*maya*), but that awareness is the essential constant of our

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[509] Rupert Spira, "Time and Death," April 22, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PNdjzm8dKOc.

[510] Rupert Spira, "Exploring the Fear of Death or Dissolution," April 15, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vodw7hkJmwo.

[511] Spira, *Art of Peace and Happiness,* 17.

mindstream. In Abrahamic faiths and Mormonism, our identity is not an illusion. It is human and permanent, and carried forth into the afterlife. e.g., In the Spirit World ancestors are recognizable.

In Spira's book *The Nature of Consciousness* the main focus is to discuss awareness, mind, and consciousness. Bernardo Kastrup also contributes a chapter. Deepak Chopra provides the foreword, in which he quotes Max Plank who he reports saying in 1931 that consciousness is fundamental, and that from which all matter is derived.[512] Spira, when examining the *hard problem of consciousness* challenges the usual assumption that mind emerges from matter and argues the exact reverse, that mind created matter. He quotes James Jeans to defend his position:

> 'I incline to the idealistic theory that consciousness is fundamental, and that the material universe is derivative from consciousness, not consciousness from the material universe…. In general, the universe seems to me to be nearer to a great thought than to a great machine.[513]

Indeed we have come a long way from the Deist view of the universe as an impersonal giant clock as well as Ryle's description of 'the ghost in the machine'.[514] Spira proceeds show how his thinking is akin to Jung, and he quotes him saying: "It is not only possible but fairly probable, even, that psyche and matter are two different aspects of one and the same thing."[515] This is indeed the case if everything is seen, as Spira argues, as consciousness itself. Spira upholds the 'consciousness only 'model and this makes sense if NDEs represent the reintegration of the separate self into the whole. He argues that humans at the deepest level are essentially the

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[512] Spira, *Nature of Consciousness*, 4.

[513] Spira, *Nature of Consciousness*, 3. James Jeans, *The Mysterious Universe* (Cambridge University *Press,*1930), 158. -- Behr, Lyell. "The Great Thought: A Look at Jeans' Universe." *The Mississippi Quarterly* 9, no. 3 (1956): 101–16.

[514] Gilbert Ryle, *Concept of Mind* (1949) He discusses and discounts Cartesian Dualism arguing that mind-body dualism is a category mistake because mind and body belong to two different categories.

[515] Jung, C. G., 'On the Nature of the Psyche', in H. Read et al., eds., *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Princeton University Press (1985; original work published 1947).

same, therefore there must be a fundamental knowledge of ourselves that transcends the local, temporal conditioning that we acquire from our cultures and thus share with all humanity, irrespective of our political, religious or ideological persuasions.[516] Consequently Spira slips into agreement with the perennial philosophy or *Sanatana Dharma*, or the idea that 'essential, eternal truths transcend all culturally bound beliefs and customs.'[517] This core source of essential unity in awareness and consciousness he proposes is not far from the perennialists claims.

Spira points out that nobody has ever experienced or could experience anything outside awareness, so the idea of an independently existing substance, namely matter, that exists outside awareness is simply a belief to which the vast majority of humanity subscribes. However, nobody has ever experienced or could experience anything outside awareness, so the idea of an independently existing substance, namely matter, that exists outside awareness is simply a belief to which the vast majority of humanity subscribes.[518] Only awareness is aware. Awareness, he argues, is not a property of the body, but a function of infinite cosmic awareness.[519] He refutes that that awareness is derived from the body as an epiphenomenon of the brain. So, he agrees with Greyson, Lommel and others on this point. Therefore, I would say that if death is the end of the body, it is only the end of the series of sensations and perceptions in the finite mind. During the NDE the finite mind is freed up to come into deeper awareness with the infinite mind. He explains that "the experience of being aware, or the knowledge 'I am,' 'I am aware' or 'There is awareness' is *awareness's knowledge of itself*."[520] If this is applied to NDEs, there is no "I" having the NDE, but awareness is having all NDEs. This might explain some NDE reports of

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[516] Spira, *Nature of Consciousness,* 4-5.
[517] Spira, *Nature of Consciousness,* 5.
[518] Spira, *Nature of Consciousness,* 17.
[519] Spira, *Nature of Consciousness,* 19.
[520] Spira, *Nature of Consciousness,* 20.

entering and merging with the infinite, the light, or with being itself, Brahman, or even as we shall see later, the *Dharmakaya.*

Spira's stress on awareness is a crucial point. Few would dispute that humans are aware. What some might dispute is the source of human awareness, both on Earth and in NDEs. Critics might say that there would still be a Divine Consciousness separate from human consciousness. Spira conflated these two forms of consciousness, but others might separate them. For some, to suggest our consciousness is the Ultimate Consciousness is blasphemy.

Summary To summarize this portion of his book, Spira explains that awareness vibrates within itself, it assumes the form of a finite mind, but finite mind is not an entity in its own right, only it is the activity of awareness. For he says using his favorite cinema screen analogy "there are no real objects, entities, or selves, each with its own separate identity, appearing in awareness, just as there are no real characters in a movie. There is only awareness and its activity, just as there is only the screen and its modulation."[521] He holds that awareness comes into form and finite minds in order to simultaneously create and know the world.[522] As for the question of our perception of multiplicity, the multiplicity of persons, things, religions, stars, NDE experiences, it also is an illusion. Spira teaches that apparent multiplicity and diversity of reality is not a quality of reality itself, but of the mind through which and as which it is perceived.[523]

The telepathy experienced in anomalous experiences and NDEs is explained by Spira as a natural communication occurring within consciousness, since the boundaries between finite minds are illusory, and especially when boundaries are relaxed after 'death' all minds inter

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[521] Spira, *Nature of Consciousness,* 20.
[522] Spira, *Nature of Consciousness,* 22.
[523] Spira, *Nature of Consciousness,* 27.

participate in knowing. This also I think explains the temporary omniscience experienced by some NDErs in that state. He says that all finite minds are precipitated within the same field of infinite … Finite minds are localisations within a single field of infinite consciousness [524] This also explains feeling the emotions and thoughts of other entities there, and during the life review. In this case I think 'heaven' could be explained as the participation of all minds within the same field of infinite consciousness, in which connectedness is paramount. The NDE therefore is a clearer and purer state of awareness. This reminds me of Jung's idea of the 'collective unconscious,' but Spira has gone much further….it is not the collective consciousness of humankind, but of everything, the unity of cosmic consciousness.

Spira's ideas about diversity and multiplicity also explain why these apparent and illusory differences do not contradict the actual singularity and indivisibility of consciousness. He explains that "It is precisely because the world appears in and is made of infinite, indivisible consciousness that it appears from the perspective of each finite mind to be the same world. It *is* the same world because all finite minds are refractions of the same consciousness." Likewise, I suggest that the apparent afterlife could be just another of these 'worlds' vibrating at a different level. I would imagine that Spira would argue that a person cannot have an NDE because "There is no such person present to pass through any state"[525]

Lastly, one of Spira's most famous analogies is the narrative about Mary's dream (i.e., Consciousness's dream) and Jane (who represents a human), in his attempt to explain how one mind can project itself into an illusory form. Jane thinks she is a separate person having thoughts, feelings and experiences in the world of matter but all the time she is a fiction of Mary's

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[524] Spira, *Nature of Consciousness,* 139.
[525] Spira, *Nature of Consciousness,* 154.

dream.[526] Jane assumes her subjective experience is her mind and stuff in the world is her objective experience, inside and outside, but this is all illusion because she is part of Mary's dream and has no independent existence outside of consciousness. Spira explains that: the knowing with which each of us is *knowing* our current experience doesn't live inside our bodies. It lives in consciousness – in fact, not 'in consciousness,' for there is no 'inside' of 'something' that has no dimensions. It *is* unlocated, unlimited consciousness!" This to me means that in an NDE there is no person having the NDE, but the separate aspect of consciousness is returning home to the source of all consciousness and illusion is dissolving. Now since NDErs return with stories of Otherworlds, perhaps their return is not complete, but they enter another kind of dreamy state within consciousness, where form and matter have dissolved but not the ego and ego aspects of self, and so some delusion and illusion remain, and a spirit world is perceived. This is all conjecture but is how an NDE can be understood from a Direct Path perspective.

Spira concludes "In religious language, the world is what God's infinite mind looks like from the perspective of a separate subject of experience. Matter is consciousness refracted through the prism of the finite mind." [527] Our perceived lives in bodies, our NDEs, in other words might just be a localized actualization of consciousness, which in itself is really indivisible. The Veil is the illusion of being separate and having a finite mind, beyond the Veil is dropping all barriers that cause division.

Explanation Spira challenges and reverses the conventional wisdom that consciousness emerged out of matter. Humans are seen as a 'localization of consciousness.' Humans experience the waking state and the dream state. Since matter is an illusion, our bodies are illusions too. He

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[526] Spira, *Nature of Consciousness,* 167.
[527] Spira, *Nature of Consciousness,* 174.

defines the nature of mind, and the operation of time and space. While it seems to us that time progresses and that we can move to different places, there is in reality only the eternal now. There is really no birth and no death, and nobody which dies. We mistake the real nature of ourselves and identify with fleeting thoughts and feelings, but our real selves are eternal. How does this apply to NDEs? Perhaps NDEs have been viewed from a faulty perspective before now. What if the usual assumptions about life and death, time, place, identity, and consciousness are incorrect? It is assumed that the Earth is 'real,' and the afterlife is somehow 'unreal' but what if the otherworld was the true state of reality and the Earth an illusion? What if the otherworld appears to be just as solid a reality as life on Earth, and the Earthly world full of people is an illusory dreamlike state? This reversed way of looking at NDEs is in accordance with the Mormon view of the Plan of Salvation. In the Plan paradise, the spirit world and heaven are the default or 'home', where Earthly spirits lived before their Earthly birth and to which they return after death. In this view Earth is a place to grow, to experience, to form relationships and fulfil missions. I do not think this is too different from Spira's idea that our eternal state is as a part of absolute consciousness and that our finite experience in form here is temporary. Secondly, if Spira says this Earthly world is an illusion, then perhaps 'heaven' is a parallel illusion, which can seem very real and solid to its visitors. In each case our consciousness is a constant.

Just as in life we assume we see cars, houses, and trees, what NDErs relate is also a landscape or place in the otherworld outside of themselves. This of course could be an illusion just as the Earth world is if we follow Spira's argument. In an NDE we are simply an aware which is left behind, not through the limited mind, but the 'thinking/ consciousness part of the NDErs sems to tap into the omniscience of the being of light, and the 'minds' or "Consciousness" of the other beings telepathically. Spira talks about the eternal and infinite

nature of our being. If the afterlife is eternal and infinite then that is why it really feels like our home, it is our natural abode. To summarize: I am Being, Pure Awareness in my true self. This is different from and independent from the mind and the body. So, at 'death' in an NDE when the body and brain and the 'Earthly bound mind' is left being only pure awareness remains. As pure awareness we are limitless, and this corresponds with the great expanse of freedom and boundlessness felt by NDErs.

Spira teaches that the intimacy of experience is love. Love is one of the central themes of an NDE. Spira talks about love being the natural condition of all experience. He says being of light and the NDEr often merge, and extreme feelings of bliss and love are experienced. Really the terms Afterlife and NDE are nonsensical from Spira's point of view because there is no birth and death. What appears to us as such is an illusion. What is experienced during an NDE is more reality than what we take to be reality on Earth. 'See clearly that we have no knowledge of our self ever having been born, changing, evolving, growing up or growing old, and that we can never have the experience of death.' [528] Spira talks about forgetting our real selves during our lives on Earth. This is similar to the NDEr claim that in heaven there is full knowledge but that our minds are wiped clean when we come to the Earth. There is a Veiling and a memory loss that occurs when we are in our Earthly life that is restored during an NDE. Only in the NDE do we realize our true nature and presence. We are self-aware in the NDE. We are neither the bodies nor minds that we identify with. However, our aware presence is constant. In NDEs the sense of real self is very strong, and consciousness is retained, even though the body and the limits of the usual mind is released. Spira's ideas make sense when NDErs relate the vastly different perceptions of time, space, place and awareness within the NDE state. The connections that

[528] Spira, *Nature of Consciousness,* 22.

NDErs have telepathically with other beings, the sense of being one with flowers in the garden, ties in with Spira's teachings about the interconnectedness of all forms of consciousness. In NDEs experiencers do feel that they are without location and limits, when they can think of something and it appears, they think of a place and go there. In an NDE we seem to be in a different location which has no limits. It is unlike the Earthly world, and it is unclear 'where' it is located. The sense given is that the otherworld is everywhere, all at once, eternally. Spira's ideas can be used to interpret NDEs, "I" and the witnessing presence in the NDE. When the NDEr is self-aware it is not through the body.

I respect Spira very much, however the main weakness in his position, as with Kastrup, it that mind alone is emphasized. One can claim, as he does, that matter is illusory, but the Earth and the Spirit World do seem very substantial and solid, and made of a form of matter. In the next chapter Tibetan Buddhism has developed a compromise there mind and matter are viewed as different aspects of consciousness. Matter is not denied, just seen from another perspective according to the doctrines of the Three Kayas and the Six Realms. A Buddha can be ethereal consciousness but also choose to appear in a physical form in a physical realm. The Pure Lands are also a sort of physical place. Spira, and indeed Kastrup, contribute to elevating the idea of the power of consciousness and mind as an independent fundamental cosmic force field, rather than a mere epiphenomenon of the brain, but in my opinion Tibetan Buddhism restores the balance.

How Direct Path Relates to NDEs Spira challenges the notion of linear time. An NDE occurs is in the eternal 'now' which corresponds with NDErs' reports about the absence of time. There is a difference between ETERNAL and EVERLASTING. Everlasting is immortality from the perspective of Earth-time. Eternal is outside of time, with no beginning or end, which also corresponds with Vajrayana and Mormon doctrines. NDErs describe a timeless otherworld, and

their descriptions come close to Spira's 'eternity.' Humans imagine heaven to be a place related to linear time. Spira shows how it can be neither. NDEs which are outside the realm of the empirical senses and rationalization. Only the avenue of introspection and the examination of the nature of consciousness itself will shed light on the type of reality described in NDEs. Only the avenue of introspection and the examination of the nature of consciousness itself will shed light on the type of reality described in NDEs. This explains why all routes to altered states of experience allow one to delve into the interior depths of their being and reach similar dimensions, outside of time and space. Since the observation if matter is not the source of knowledge for Spira, rather introspection, this explains why our culture thinks NDEs cannot be validated. NDEs and their reality remain in consciousness which is immaterial. Yet awareness does not necessarily mean imagined and unreal, as dreams are assumed to be unreal in the sense that they do not correspond to Earth reality. NDEs can absolutely be seen as real, especially if they contain universally shared elements.[529]

Spira has taught that inner and outer experiences are the same, Mary and Jane are the same, so whether I create my NDE from my mind or greater consciousness creates my NDE for me to receive, it is all the same. Both are working together as one in a co-creation experience, because all come from consciousness. The thinking 'I' is also the 'all'. I think the problems and confusion result from the common human tendency to reify everything. We love to categorize and label things, experiences, observations, and put them into different labelled boxes. Eastern thought breaks down these barriers of separation as it tries to dissolve the illusion of *maya*.

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[529] The word reality is derived from *res* in Latin, meaning 'thing'. Spira points out that this betrays a Western/ Latin based assumption that reality is the world of matter. Spira, *Nature of Consciousness,* 17.

Consciousness is not an object, nor a thing and cannot be reified. As we delve deeper into Vajrayana's perspective now this claim will be explained further.

Spira's words seem repetitive and complex but really, they are remarkably simple. The Direct Path means that at the beginning of the spiritual path, the conclusion and answer is given so liberation can be directly achieved. Rupert's work is easiest accessed by the many lectures and teachings he gives online. In his definition of consciousness, is the answer and explanation to death and after death. To paraphrase his own words, he teaches that when you die consciousness doesn't leave you. To think this way betrays a false assumption that I am a physical body with consciousness located inside me. What happens is the consciousness on the outside, which localized in the form of my body, ceases to be localized there, but it has not changed. So, what appears to be death is simply the unlocalizing of consciousness. Mind is constant. It is like the body leaves the mind rather than the mind leaving the body. My body in death leaves my mind, my dream. Local consciousness reverts to universal consciousness.[530] Loved ones who appear to die from our confused perspective, but don't really die, but live on in our hearts.[531] The body is an image in the finite mind and the finite mind is a localization of infinite consciousness. The body is a mixture of images, sensations and perceptions which appear in the mind, and we must become the finite mind it's only as a finite mind the consciousness can know the World.

If consciousness wants to know the world it has to focus it has to narrow its vision it has to assume the position of the body and it is only as that body-based consciousness that it can know the world. So, when the body dies just a particular localization of consciousness

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[530] Rupert Spira, "What Happens When We Die? Understanding Death and Consciousness," August 21, 2022, https://youtu.be/bD0Y7bPN3Qg?si=XfcjvnDeeyhNS7IK.

[531] Rupert Spira, "Where Do Loved Ones Go When They Die?" September 3, 2021. https://youtu.be/PIIhgORcE4c?si=45v8jFkBeZFyN-DF.

disperses your finite mind is a localization of consciousness when the localization dissolves the consciousness doesn't dissolve. When the body dies the whirlpool dissolves, but nothing disappears, because all there is to the whirlpool is water. [532]the water remains but it no longer precipitates in the form of the body mind. So, the mind is like a precipitation or like a whirlpool. It's a localization of consciousness and the body in the world appear in that localization when the body disappears that localization disperses however as the as the localization disperses its contents are still in consciousness so there's no reason why another localization shouldn't form but contain the elements of the previously dispersed whirlpool which would explain why successive lives. He ends by explaining that consciousness goes through a successive contraction and relaxation from infinite to finite mind during our periods of wakefulness and deep sleep, and that basically dying is like going to sleep, there is not clear moment, just a sliding into one state from the other.[533]

Now recently he updated his explanation to leave room for what I will suggest is a place of a heaven or Bardo. He says that just as it takes time for Consciousness to localize itself as a body it takes time for Consciousness to delocalize itself and this this that there may be an interim period a kind of dream state that takes place after the so-called death of the body before going back to infinite Consciousness.[534] This solves a small ussie I had with Spira. I kept thinking that he talks about polarities, but afterlife states are in between, neither of the Earth, not being one with universal consciousness. The people in the spirit world are not yet made exhaulted gods in a process of apotheosis and the Bardo Beings are not in a state of *Dharmakaya*. Spira's concession

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[532] He references Bernardo Kastrup when he uses this metaphor.

[533] Rupert Spira, "What Happens to Awareness after Death?" February 13, 2015, https://youtu.be/KwRDCj2Qgyw?si=2bOmMkGNkr6udiHl.

[534] Rupert Spira, "Is There Life After Death?" May 19, 2024, https://youtu.be/I_Ct-mxRRdo?si=reDLDmuHfbJuQFPl.

that there may be a temporary place inbetween where progress can be made leaves room for the spirit world and the Bardo. [535]

My issue is that Spirit World and Bardo are not states of full absorption with universal consciousness but some other higher but partial forms of universal consciousness and that explains the enhanced 'superpowers' of Bardo and spirit beings who still carry ego and identity. Logically if from can appear in the body in the world, a similar illusion can appear in the afterlife, they are just a little closer to source and universal consciousness than humans on Earth.

Why Spira and Kastrup Are Insufficient and Do Not Offer a Complete and Practical Spiritual Path

Spira's method is to focus on awareness that precedes experience, memory, emotion, and feelings. However, I add that the afterlife states in NDEs and the Bardo are essentially all about experience and feelings, not just the awareness behind them. Spiritual progress. After all, did not awareness in a pure form choose to become embodied in order to experience a separate experience. So, experience is valuable both before and after death. is all about understanding these distinctions. I would not discard the value of experiences, or even illusory projections. Spiritual practices are required in addition to philosophies to grow and evolve whilst understanding the relationship of awareness and experiences. Whilst Spira's teachings are illuminating, they come from a spiritual teacher whose focus is on the theoretical and the abstract. He does not offer a practical lifestyle path to reach this enlightened state, and most humans might not be able to understand his intellectual approach. This is also true of the

[535] Rupert Spira," Is There Life After Death?" May 19, 2024, https://youtu.be/I_Ct-mxRRdo?si=reDLDmuHfbJuQFPl.

philosopher Kastrup. Both philosophies have afterlife implications, but the afterlife is not the main focus of these philosophers. Understanding concepts and applying them practically in life are two different things. This is why I think mere philosophy is not enough to navigate the afterlife realms. Tibetan Buddhism and Mormonism provide practical training in how to navigate the afterlife. Temple ceremonies prepare the Saints for this transition, to pass through the Veil, literally. Tibetans spend their lives in preparation for the transition. Both religions have scripture and rituals and reminders of navigating the post death state.

Spira and Kastrup's strengths are highlighting the polarities of Earthly 'me' versus the all-embracing consciousness at the highest level. Yet I would argue there are levels of consciousness between the Ultimate, the *Dharmakaya* and ordinary ego 'me' levels. The afterlife realms as described in Tibetan Buddhism and Mormonism are higher yet still in between and transitionary levels of consciousness. I study these in between realms of the Bardo and the Spirit World which are neither the ultimate in terms of exaltation nor liberation, not the Earth-bound amnesiac states. There are gradations in spiritual and consciousness development in between the polarities. Both Spira and Kastrup are useful and valid and valuable in understanding consciousness, but my focus is not on the contrast of extremes but on the process of transition through the afterlives. I am sure both would agree with my assertion that our limited selves still have the power to manifest reality, both in the Earthly and in the afterlife 'illusions'. The term illusion does not mean unreal but rather a form of reality, even a physical appearing reality, that is not understood by those inside of it. To say the Earth life is an illusion does not imply it is unreal of nonexistence, just that we do not comprehend its true nature. Likewise, we misunderstand afterlives, which are also transitionary rather than permanent. Spira and Kastrup's philosophies would best be utilized in conjunction with another spiritual path that is practical.

Considering the various candidates from religions, I suggest therefore that looking at the Tibetan Buddhist approach to navigating the afterlife is essential. Knowing that there is a *Dharmakaya*, and Samsara intellectually is insufficient for liberation. Spiritual practices such as meditation, Dream Yoga, the practice of compassion, non-attachment and wisdom are necessary for liberation. This lifelong preparation as an approach is a more developed, practical, holistic, and all-encompassing aid in our spiritual progression.

Conclusion of Part Two

It is my position that NDEs and VTEs can only be understood if we come to embrace a new understanding of consciousness and mind. The search for an explanation of NDEs, OBEs, and similar experiences requires a fresh understanding of consciousness. Consciousness is itself a mysterious and not fully understood phenomenon which is at the root of the mystery of NDEs. As the nature of consciousness is better understood, so will the NDE phenomenon. David Chalmer's explanation of *the hard problem of consciousness* highlights the polarity of explanations for consciousness.[536] At the moment, two camps hold opposite views to explain NDEs. Mainstream science is adamant that mind and all experiences come from brain, and that NDEs are a form of hallucination. This camp argues that matter creates mind and another that mind creates matter, with no proof either way. Scientists still cannot explain how a mushy brain can produce consciousness. There is great reluctance from this camp to even explore ideas such as non-local consciousness.

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[536] David Chalmers, "The Hard Problem of Consciousness," in *The Blackwell Companion to Consciousness*, ed. Susan Schneider (John Wiley & Sons, 2017), 32-42. David John Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind: In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2004).

In the other camp, scholars such as Pim Van Lommel argue for non-local consciousness. This can be described using an analogy: imagine some form of universal consciousness existing in the cosmos which the brain tunes into, like a cell phone picking up a Wi-Fi signal and gaining access to the cloud. The theory of non-local consciousness is compatible with many religious perspectives, and beliefs in invisible spiritual realms, and it can provide an explanation for how NDEs occur. In this view the out of body essence of the person enters the realm of consciousness and has experiences there. Obviously, this is exceedingly difficult to prove to the satisfaction of science. Here is the dilemma, science represents the collective consensus of many people who can agree on what is known, given observations of the physical world. Not all scientists agree, but it is a group consensus, nonetheless. Religious experiences are personal, and while many people might have similar experiences, they are not the same experience. The voice of one person cannot easily form a consensus, and the realm they experience is hidden from most humans.

Another group of scholars, those that have investigated psychedelic, or meditative, holotropic breathwork anomalous experiences, also have strong voices that add to this discussion. Whilst researching NDEs I realized that the label is very limiting, and that similar experiences occurred with other altered states of consciousness such as those produced by drugs, breathwork and meditation. Perhaps journeys to the realm of the Otherworlds has many doors or entry methods. Some significant similarities in the experiences, are out of body experiences, meeting spirits and entities, and sometimes receiving knowledge, or blissful merging with an all-encompassing "One."

The realms and Otherworlds experienced in these 'trips' are similar to the NDE experiences, leading some to speculate that all experiencers are entering either the same realm, or

gaining access to a multiverse of other dimensions. Why then do people see different things, for example why do Mormons see the Spirit World and not Yama? Perhaps we see what we expect to see, and there are some cultural expectations. However wishful thinking does not eradicate the possibility of the Otherworld 'actually' existing independently. Perhaps the other side presents itself to humans in the manner most suitable for each experiencer, presenting itself in ways that will be culturally understood. There is no way to know how this operates, and both scenarios might coexist. If everything exists in eternal and Ultimate Consciousness, then there possibly is room for both a Spirit World and the Blissful Land of Amitabha and other places. Just because a phenomenon cannot be understood does not justify dismissing and shelving the topic. It has even been suggested in popular culture that extraterrestrial beings might be interdimensional beings, and some suggest ETs were formerly misunderstood and labelled as demons and angels, gods, and goddesses. Jacques Vallee has contributed a lens though which to understand these strange experiences. Religious Studies also offers a useful lens to view and explore the intricacies and interrelationship of all these ideas, which may, or may not actually be connected.

NDErs testify that after death consciousness continues, and although science finds no proof of this claim, they are supported by religious doctrines across the world. Whilst Freudians and sceptics will argue that ideas of survival are based on fear of 'nothingness' after death, and wishes for survival, mere wish fulfilment theories do not rule out the literal possibility of survival after death. Near-Death Studies eventually lead the scholar to question the nature of reality and this leads into the exploration of different philosophical explanations. In this dissertation both Western and Eastern philosophical ideas will be explored. Eastern Religions suggest that the world is maya, illusion, or not what it appears to be. A similar sentiment is now

found in Western popular culture and quantum physics, while poorly understood, is used, or misused and appropriated to try to back up this view.

In 2024 there are many competing theories in popular culture e.g., that we live in a matrix, a simulated reality… which are not too dissimilar to the idea of Samsara. There are cross cultural currents that may explain the similarity of theories, but again, humans often produce similar ideas in different times and places. There is a hunger to fill spiritual emptiness with meaning, and people crave answers to the meaning of a life that seems bewildering. There is a wish to believe. NDErs would assert that the 'other side' is our 'real home,' and that Earth is a stage, a school, a place to evolve. Humans tend to assume that Earth is the default existence, perhaps the only one, but it may not be supernatural. Neither can 'prove' that their explanation is the final answer. The UAP phenomena is a similar conundrum, with similar mysteries.[537] Then there is the idea of a legalistic type of proof rather than a scientific proof, when circumstantial evidence in terms of numbers affect reasonable doubt. Stephen E. Braude thinks there is a reasonable basis for accepting postmortem survival given the large body of evidence, but he reminds us that simply seeing an afterlife on the cusp of death is not the same as proof of an eternal afterlife.[538] Visions in NDEs are one thing, in other words and an eternal immortality is another.

There are so many thousands of NDEs with similarities, that the phenomenon cannot be dismissed. One argument is that science is not equipped to investigate NDEs, because so much is religious or spiritual in nature. However, scientists would disagree. I would say that an explanation is part of a process, and that science changes, as do religions, over time. It is possible

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[537] This is why Robert Bigalow investigates NDEs, UFOs and Consciousness together.

[538] Stephen E. Braude, *Immortal Remains: The Evidence for Life After Death* (Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).

that in the future physicists will find an explanation and discover new things about the nature of our reality and consciousness and how the invisible and the physical are interconnected.

Thomas S. Kuhn gives a helpful perspective on this problem in his book *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions.*[539] This book was first published in 1962, seven years before a man walked on the moon. He says that every scientific revolution involves the rejection of a time-honored scientific theory in favor of a new they which is incompatible with the former.[540] The successive transition from one paradigm to another via revolution is the usual developmental pattern of mature science.[541] His book explains how anomalies are incorporated into science and theories change as a result. I suggest that NDEs are such an anomaly that threaten the assumptions of the current perspective. In the current paradigm supernatural causes of NDEs are dismissed because they don't fit in. When evidence and experiences mount it pushes against the paradigm and new ways of explaining and investigation arise. Kuhn says: "scientific revolutions are inaugurated by a growing sense, again often restricted to a narrow subdivision of the scientific community, that an existing paradigm has ceased to function adequately in the exploration of an aspect of nature to which that paradigm itself had previously led the way."[542] Below are a sampling of various explanations of NDEs. I highlight voices that are pertinent, but of course I cannot provide a universal comprehensive encyclopedic guide, instead I am mentioning the most relevant in my opinion.

In this chapter I have presented the history of Near-Death Studies and incorporated an informal literature review of all the most common explanations of NDEs. I listed scientific, and

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[539] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Univ. of Chicago Press, 1970).
[540] Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 6.
[541] Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 9.
[542] Kuhn, *Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* 92.

other academic approaches, supranatural and supernatural approaches, and specific philosophical attempts to explain religious experiences, including other types of strange experiences alongside NDEs, that seem to point to similar otherworldly realms. There are explanations that reject the divine, or claim a religious or philosophical explanation both theistic, not theistic, dual, and non-dual. Despite all this knowledge and all the theories, none is definitive and one's choice comes down to personal preference. Perhaps looking for answers and explanations is the wrong approach. Perhaps simply being aware of all the possibilities, living a good life and preparing for a good death are all for which we can hope? I have my own opinions after all this reading.

Mind creates matter I think that the idea of non-local consciousness explains many anomalies, as does the idea that mind creates matter, not the other way round. I know that 95% of the universe is dark matter and dark energy and mostly unknown. Perhaps these mysteries are hidden in the 95% of the cosmos we cannot even perceive with our senses. Consciousness does seem to link everything, and all living things embody sentience and awareness, they carry a life force which is passed on in regeneration of their species. My own breath, which keeps me alive in my body, is inherited from my long line of grandmothers like some breathing baton passed down in a relay race. This in itself is amazing and almost magical. This line of continuity was of course recognized and represented by the living flame of Zoroastrian Temples, a light that burned for centuries which mother birthed all other fires and sacred lights. In my position saying that I have awareness, and consciousness means that I am a child of God Consciousness. I am not the wholeness of God, just as drop of water is not the whole ocean. I do accept that we can create our own reality but unlike Kastrup and Spira, my position is that Earth and the Spirit World and Pure Lands can be experienced as physical. Neither Spira or Kastrup directly engage Mormon or Tibetan ideologies of the afterlife. There is no interfaith dialogue, just an insistence

on the non-physical and no room for a Divine intelligence. My position is that afterlife realms are exactly how they are experienced. Illusion, in my position, means misunderstood, not nonexistent.

Mind creates both the Earth life experience and the afterlife experience. This proposal is part of my thesis. If mind creates matter than what it can create is limitless. While this assertion appears speculative it is the conclusion I glean from my readings of all these scholars in this section and as we will find out in the next chapter, Tibetan Buddhists also hold this ancient position.

Part of my sixth form education at Malvern College, involved learning John Hick's compact booklet *Philosophy of Religion* by heart so that I could recite it verbatim.[543] This small book systematically listed all the proofs of God's existence in classical theology and philosophy and all the reasons and grounds for disbelief in God. The arguments for the existence of God from Design (teleological) and from special events and experiences could not win against the challenge of modern science and the social sciences. It considered the role of faith and human immortality as well as conflicting truth claims and the problem of verification. Little has changed, his perennialist perspective is still challenged, religions still disagree with each other and all with scientific naturalism. It is commendable that he gave space for the arguments of parapsychology, pointing out that it is too early for a final verdict dismissing its claims, saying "one should be careful not to confuse absence of knowledge with knowledge of absence." [544] I agree with Hick that while God's existence might not be proven then neither can it be disproven by science. [545] If one accepts God or some personal or impersonal Ultimate then accepting

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[543] John Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, Second edition, (Prentice-Hall, 1973).
[544] Hick, *Philosophy of Religion,* 106.
[545] Hick, *Philosophy of Religion,* 47.

revelation, afterlives, religious experiences NDEs can follow. If one rejects God and Ultimates then the opposite is true, and there is no Otherworlds to go to or communicate with. Religious experiences can be persuasive and seem so real for the experiencers but are not argument for those who have not had these experiences. Hick concedes that no special event or experience can be proof of the divine.[546] Some NDErs claim they return healed, or hat angels intervened to help them in their lives, science dismisses the idea of miraculous interventions. Perhaps it all comes down to faith. What is my faith? If I had to take a guess, might I suggest that consciousness is at the root of reality and what we witness in life, is the universe and consciousness manifesting in form so that it can come to know itself in an unlimited multiplicity of ways. Will now transition from presenting a theistic Hindu based non-duality, the Direct Path to a similar but non-theistic Vajrayana approach to the afterlife.

[546] Hick, *Philosophy of Religion*, 30.

PART THREE: TIBETAN BUDDHIST, VAJRAYANA VIEWS ON THE AFTERLIFE AND THE BARDO THÖDOL

Chapter Four

NDEs and the Bardo Thödol: Towards a Tibetan Buddhist Metaphysics of NDEs

In this third and final section, I will work from the most significant texts in my own tradition of Tibetan Vajrayana Buddhism, the *Bardo Thödol,* and here I hope to make another three contributions. (i) to understand the nature of NDEs from a Bardo perspective. (ii) to explore a speculative hypothesis that Mormon NDEs might be seen as a sort of Bardo experience, for example, comparable to Amitabha's Pure Land and other Buddha Lands. (iii) Thirdly, I will state the metaphysical perspective from Vajrayana Buddhism, that I personally find the most adequate in the end as a metaphysical understanding of this crucial phenomenon. I begin this chapter with a (i) brief literature review of the *Bardo Thödol* (*Tibetan Book of the Dead*.), and (ii) a brief discussion of its cultural setting in East and West. (iii) Then I will introduce some key Vajrayana concepts that must be understood in order to appreciate the Tantric philosophy of the afterlife. (iv) I will introduce the concept of the Delog as similar to NDE experiences. (v) then I will show how despite surface differences the Tibetan tradition uphold ideas of disembodied awareness and the eternal continuation of consciousness, and how it validates the idea of co-creation of reality and the contents of the afterlife.

> "O child of noble family, that which is called death has now arrived, so you should adopt this attitude: 'I have arrived at the time of death, so now, by means of this death, I will adopt only the attitude of the enlightened state of mind, friendliness and compassion, and attain perfect enlightenment for the sake of all sentient beings as limitless as space. With this attitude, at this special time for the sake of all sentient beings, I will recognize the Luminosity of death as the Dharmakāya and attaining in that state the supreme realization of the Great Symbol, I will act for the good of all beings. If I do not attain this, I will recognize the Bardo state as it is and attaining the indivisible Great Symbol form in the Bardo, I will act for the good of all beings as limitless as space in whatever way will influence them.' (*Tibetan Book of the Dead*).[1]

(i) Tibetan Buddhist[2] views on the afterlife are known to us in the West from two traditions, one is the written text, and the lineage teachings passed down from Lama to younger monks, and the other is from the oral tradition of the Delogs. Since the 1950's, given the political unrest in Tibet, many Tibetan monks including the Dalai Lama XIV fled to India and across the world in a diaspora. This occurred at the same time that Western counterculture was looking to India for spiritual inspiration, and a ready audience eager to hear the Dharma aided the spread of Tibetan Buddhism in the West. Today many retreat and Dharma centers dot the North American and European and Australian continents keeping the precious lineage teachings alive, even outside their usually cultural context.[3] Most Westerners have heard of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*, and like the topic of NDEs, its name has become part of popular culture. However, few know about its origins and journey to the West. In fact, it is part of a larger genre of Tibetan literature that remains little known in the West, the Tibetan genre of death texts. This point is

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[1] Dedicating one's death for the benefit of all sentient beings. Chögyam Trungpa; Francesca Fremantle. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo*. (Shambhala, 2000). **While it might seem obvious, not all dead people realize that they are dead. The opening pages of the Bardo Thödol inform the deceased that they are indeed dead. This is important!**

[2] Westerners gave the "-ism" name to other religious they encountered and labelled' Buddhism' and' Hinduism' to fit into 18th and 19th century categorization and nomenclature. In fact, they are a maze of various but related spiritualities. Tibetan Buddhism is not 'one religion', but is comprised of various lineages, folk traditions and the indigenous Bon religion.

[3] While I have attended Tibetan meetings with Tibetans, in the Western States it is usually Westerners and East Asians who make up the audiences and visitors to retreat centers.

emphasized by the erudite scholar Detlef Info Lauf, author of *Secret Doctrines of The Tibetan Books of the Dead*. [4] (Note the plural of '*Books*') Graham Parkes who reviews this encyclopedic book said: "there is more than one book of the dead. In fact, the bibliography of original Tibetan sources lists thirty-nine Buddhist and seven Bon-po texts dealing with books of the dead and iconography, and even that list of Tibetan eschatological literature is not exhaustive." [5]

Robert Goss and Dennis Klass refer to the thousands of Tibetan Buddhist texts and images on death, as well as inspiration accounts of the deaths of great Lamas and Yogis, as well as instructional manuals and *phowa* texts. [6] I must acknowledge the errors in translation and transmission attributable to Wentz and also in how the text was utilized in modern 1960's counterculture and its influences. This text was written in Tibet, but its transmission lineage came to California, (San Francisco and Oregon) and it morphed into a new role, which its creator might not have intended. Nevertheless, if the intention were to reduce suffering and fear of death, it did fulfil that intention in the West. The text can be taken literally, or as a metaphor of what one's afterlife might operate, i.e., the projections of ego and ignorance and how that affects spiritual progress and rebirth.

Most Tibetans would not expect a non-Tibetan to see the entities described in the text because if the visions are self-projected, only concepts in the mind of the projector, the deceased, would emanate into Bardo form. This A Westerner might see their own special and significant figures instead of Buddhas, within a similar framework of reincarnation. This any applicable

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[4] Detlef Ingo Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan Books of the Dead* (Shambhala,1977). He has a psychological approach.

[5] Turrell V. Wylie, Detlef Ingo Lauf, and Graham Parkes. "Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan Books of the Dead." *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 99, no. 3 (1979) 510-511.

[6] Robert E. Goss, and Klass, Dennis. "Tibetan Buddhism and the resolution of grief: The Bardo-Thödol for the dying and the grieving." *Death Studies* 21, no. 4 (1997): 377-395.

universality is not to be sought in comparing the Buddhas that appear in the Bardo to angels or Jesus, but the comparison should be in the simple appearance of visions, the inner realizations, the choices, the conscious awareness that continues.[7] The Tibetan system can accommodate different cultures in this way and the argument would be that despite one's religion one is in Samsara. There is no need to be Buddhist, because the Bardo system can accommodate diversity in humankind. Buddhism offers the best chance of liberation, but all humans go through a similar process at death.

History of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*: West Discovering the East

In the last thirty years more and more Tibetans, rather than modern academics, or 20th century Orientalists, have written books aimed at a Western audience and one of the predominant themes is how to die well and secure liberation or a good human rebirth. It is important to read sources both from internal and external settings. One of the foremost experts on Tibetan Buddhism and the *Bardo Thödol* is Bryan Cuevas and another is Donald S. Lopez Jr.[8] John Baldock is another esteemed scholar who has written on *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.[9] He describes in great detail the history and context of how this text was developed and then came West when Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz published it in 1927.[10] Evans-Wentz was influenced by

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[7] To clarify any confusion, there is not one "Buddha" as some Westerners think. There are millions of Buddhas, and we all have to potential to become Buddhas. Who Westerners refer to is usually Siddhartha, Gautama Buddha, often called Shakyamuni, who lived in India, born circa c. 563 BCE or 480 BCE. Metaphysically all Buddhas are One in the sense of the *Dharmakaya* Ultimate.

[8] Cuevas, Bryan J. *The hidden history of the Tibetan Book of the Dead*. (Oxford University Press, 2005). -- Also see Lopez Jr, Donald S. *Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the west*. (University of Chicago Press, 2018).

[9] John Baldock, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Arcturus Publishing, 2018).

[10] Karma-gliṅ-pa, The Tibetan Book of the Dead; or, the After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane, according to LāMa Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering. Edited by W. Y. Evans-Wentz, Translated by Zla-ba-bsam-'grub (Oxford University Press, 1927).

spiritualism and Theosophy, which strangely brings the connections to New York and the *Burned- over district* full circle. This is the same district In New York where Joseph Smith felt spiritual awakenings.[11] Robert Goss and Dennis Klass have explored the cross-cultural aspects of the *Bardo Thödol*. They emphasize the ritual and psychological aspects and point to ways in which humans navigate death. They argue that even though death is a universal experience, the approaches of Asian cultures to death and mourning is not well understood in the West, even amongst Western converts to Buddhism.[12] One misconception is they dispel is that Tibetans do not fear death because they believe in reincarnation, they do, and they learn that they need to ask for protection of Bodhisattvas to protect them from Yama! [13] They mention the Living and Dying Project in San Francisco which champions conscious dying.[14] This is where Ram Dass used *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* to help the dying transition.[15] In 1919 Walter Yeeling Evans-Wentz came across some block prints of Tibetan origin, in Darjeeling,[16] and he asked Kazi Dawa Samdup[17] to translate them. Evans-Wentz, aware of the popularity of *The Egyptian Book of the Dead*, applied a similar title to this text, although all they had in common was the topic of an afterlife. This text was part of a larger group of texts, but he had received the '*Great Liberation*

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[11] "Awakenings in the Burned-Over District: New Light on the Historical Setting of the First Vision | Religious Studies Center," RSC, n.d., https://rsc.byu.edu/exploring-first-vision/awakenings-burned-over-district-new-light-historical-setting-first-vision.

[12] Robert E. Goss, and Klass, Dennis. "Tibetan Buddhism and the resolution of grief: The Bardo-Thödol for the dying and the grieving." *Death Studies* 21, no. 4 (1997): 377-395.

[13] Goss, Tibetan Buddhism, 377.

[14] Admin, "Welcome - the Living Dying Project." The Living Dying Project, November 10, 2024, https://www.livingdying.org/

[15] Spiritetmusik, "Guidance for the Dyings With the Bardo Thodol in San Francisco With Ram Dass," December 8, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LrYqk3j5rys.

[16] He purchased them from a British officer called Major Campbell, whose Gyantse block prints came from a certain lineage from eastern Tibet traced back to Rikzin Nyima Drakpa (1647-1710).

[17] A brief biography of Kazi Dawa Samdup is provided in Fields 1992, pp. 285- 287. This lama had produced his own *Tibetan-English Dictionary* in 1919 and had worked previously as translator for a number of notable personalities, including Alexandra David-Neel (1868-1969), Sir Charles Bell (1870-1945), Sir John Woodroffe (alias Arthur Avalon), and Major W. L. Campbell.

upon Hearing in the Bardo' [*Bar-do thos-grol chen-mo*], which I will refer to hence as the *Bardo Thödol.* [18] Whilst it is a text it is meant to be read aloud, recited for the recently deceased, to guide them through the Bardo. It is not even necessary to recite it out loud because it is believed that the deceased can receive the message from the living reciter via telepathic communication. [19] It is believed that the dead can hear the living, which indeed is corroborated by Delogs and those who have had an OBE. Samdup died in 1922 before the translation was edited and so Evans-Wentz, who was more familiar with Hindu religions, had to rework and arrange the book and he left his own Orientalist perspectives and impressions on it. Cuevas comments:

With his truly idiosyncratic interpretations of Dawa Samdup's text pervading every part of its published version. Evans-Wentz both inaugurated and authorized in one fell swoop a distinctive style and method of commentarial tradition that would mark *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* throughout its many lives in Western popular culture.[20] Even parallels between the writing of this book and the writing of the Book of Mormon have been suggested. Tanner McAlister drew parallels between the roles of Joseph Smith Jr. and Karma Lingpa, who both 'channeled' sacred texts from a supernatural author.[21]

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[18] This collection of texts is derived from a larger body of literature called Self-Liberated Wisdom of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities [Zhi-khro dgongs-pa rang-grol].

[19] Matthew T. Kapstein. Buddhist Afterlife Beliefs and Funerary Practices.in *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying.* (Routledge, 2017), 143.

Liminal states and liminal beings in Moreman, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying,*146.

[20] Bryan J. Cuevas, *The Hidden History of the Tibetan Book of the Dead*. (Oxford University Press, 2005), 5.

[21] Tanner Davidson McAlister, "The Production of the Book of Mormon in Light of a Tibetan Buddhist Parallel." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 55, no. 4 (2022): 42.

The Tibetan Book of The Dead Translations [22]

Bryan Cuevas says that the *Bardo Thödol* is the most famous and widely read work of Tibetan literature.[23] There are now almost a dozen translations, of varying quality and aimed at varied audiences. There is a danger when reading or presenting a text out of its cultural context that misinterpretation can occur. Cuevas warns: “each new and creative presentation of this text has been, in spite of Dawa Samdup's early warning, "peculiarly liable to misinterpretation and consequent misuse."[24] He adds that it is used as a ritual guide for the deathbed and deceased, rather than a literary text and that this has led to the problem of creating a homogenized understanding of the text, which is universalist and ahistorical,[25] The roots of this misunderstanding are linked to the British Raj and the ‘glamorization of a mysterious Tibet’ as encouraged by early explorers and the Theosophists like Madame Helena Blavatsky. The Western myth of the East as a repository of ancient wisdom, and the abode of the Ascended Masters, which even Tibetans were unaware of, and other spiritualist interpretation of Eastern ideas abounded and exported back to the West.

This twisted diffusion was also influenced by ideas grounded in social Darwinism and the idea of the evolution of religions, which in a contemporary light, cast Evans -Wentz and Theosophist in a politically incorrect position! Only Westerners, it seems, can extrapolate the secret doctrines, the esoteric messages out of the exoteric texts. It is well known that the Westerns saw, and cherry picked what stood out to them as important and ignored the rest in

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[22] For the best historical context see, Donald S. Lopez Jr, *Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (University of Chicago Press, 2018). (The history of Bardo Thodol pages 62-68 is especially good). Michael Nahm, "The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Its History and Controversial Aspects of its Contents." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 29, no. 3 (2011): 373-398.

[23] Cuevas, *Hidden History Tibetan,* 4.

[24] Cuevas, *Hidden History Tibetan,* 5.

[25] Cuevas, *Hidden History Tibetan,* 5.

their encounters with Eastern religions. Since rationalism was highly regarded in the west, the more rational aspects of Tibetan religion were plucked out of context and emphasized, while the more' superstitious,' folk, artistic and ritual aspects were not only denigrated but regarded as a corruption of some mythical pure Buddhism, that in fact had never existed. This was to fit into the Western theory that modern Hindu and Buddhist beliefs were degraded and corrupted versions of an ancient wisdom.

Evans-Wentz had come to rescue the Tibetan from themselves! Carl Jung and the German Lama Govinda[26] both added their own commentaries to Evans-Wentz's book. Jung stressed the psychological aspects and merged it with his own theories and interpretations. [27] Cuevas comments that "For Jung, the *Book of the Dead* provides access to the universal structures of the human psyche and is significant only inasmuch as it validates his own psychological propositions." Cuevas also criticizes Govinda's psychological approach, especially when Govinda judged the Tibetans for not, in his conceited opinion, realizing the proper message of the book! [28]

Tibetans use the book differently and have a different perspective on it. That is why as a westerner most of my understanding of this text comes from oral teachings provided by western lamas, who themselves brought the text here via a different avenue in the mid-20th century to California and Oregon. Tibetan Buddhists know Westerners use and interpret this book differently, but they are open to Westerner taking religious ideas from them and understanding

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[26] Lama Anagarika Govinda (1898-1985), also in the 3rd edition of Evans-Wentz's *Tibetan Book of the Dead* 1957.

[27] In the third edition of Evans-Wentz's *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, 1957.

[28] Cuevas, *Hidden History Tibetan,* 9.

them through their different cultural lens. All that really matters is the cultivation of wisdom.[29] It is taught as an aid to the dying and as a guidebook and set of instructions for those traversing the Bardos with the intention that they either achieve enlightenment or find a good rebirth. Many of the images encountered in the Bardo are frightening and a nervous person can get 'lost' more easily. Familiarization and directions with the Bardo therefore give the deceased confidence to achieve a better outcome, since progress in this ream is based not only on one's karma but on one's reactions, recognitions, and choices.

More erudite and academic translations from the original source have since been offered by academics and writers aiming at audiences in popular culture. The *Bardo Thödol* in is part of a larger Tibetan tradition which includes other similar and related texts which stem from similar teachings offered by each of the four main schools,[30] and which all give advice and instruction on how to die and what to expect afterwards. While I do not subscribe to the idea that the *Bardo Thödol* contains magical secrets, or universal wisdom, discovered by Westerners, I still find it a valuable starting point to understanding Tibetan afterlife ideas. I would always recommend reading it with guidance from a Tibetan Buddhist teacher, and many social media videos are available on the internet or given in retreat centers on this topic.

The Various Editions and Translations

1) Evans-Wentz's 1927 publication of Karma-glin-pa's 14th century *Bardo Thödol* (*Bar*

[29] Conversion is not required at all when Westerners encounter Tibetan Buddhism. The Tibetans are open minded and are willing to share their religion and allow blended traditions such as Celtic Buddhism founded by Chogyam Trungpa.

[30] Nyingma, Kagyu, Sakya and Gelugpa.

do thos grol), translated by Kazi Dawa-Samdup, appeared in various editions.[31] The first edition had a foreword by Sir John Woodroffe (1865-1936), aka Arthur Avalon, the tantric author. A 1957 3rd edition C.G. Jung and Lama Anagarika Govinda. The 2000 edition includes commentaries by Donald S. Lopez, a famous Tibetan scholar and author of his own commentary on the text.[32]

2) Robert Thurman.[33] I feel closest to Thurman's interpretation because he is one of the few scholars that takes suggestion of an afterlife literally rather than metaphorically. He accepts that there is a constant consciousness traversing the chain of reincarnations. He argues that the realms after death seem just as real as the Earth realm and that past life memories confirm this. [34] Cuevas commends him for blending a scientific with a humanistic interpretation and for recognizing its practical applications in offering techniques on the art of dying and resources to call upon enlightened beings to rescue those who feel lost.[35] Francesca Fremantle and Chögyam Trungpa's modern and easy to read translation published in 1975 is a popular version which also stresses the psychological aspects of the text. Cuevas points out that the psychological categories in this translation are more Western than those of the Tibetan philosophy of mind. Cuevas points out that terms borrowed from modern psychoanalysis, such as *ego, neurosis, projection, paranoia* are used in translation.[36] Alan Watts reviewed this edition noting that in Evans-Wentz

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[31] Karma-gliṅ-pa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead; or, the After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane, according to LāMa Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering*, ed. W. Y. Evans-Wentz, trans. Zla-ba-bsam-'grub (Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1927).

[32] Donald S. Lopez, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: A Biography* (Princeton University Press, 2011).

[33] Robert Thurman, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Liberation Through Understanding in the Between.* (Bantam, 1993).

[34] Thurman, *Tibetan Book Dead,* 33, 27. Also see Lopez Jr, *Prisoners of Shangri-la,* 81.

[35] Cuevas, *Hidden History Tibetan,* 8.

[36] Cuevas, *Hidden History Tibetan,* 10. -- Cuevas also says that Detlef lngo Lauf entitled *Geheimlehren tibetischer Totenbucher* study on the *Bardo Thödol* falls into using the psychological vocabulary of the West, but his translation is excellent and noteworthy, given he is a scholar of Tibetan language.

wrote in it as having a special relevance for the spiritual problems of modern man.[37] Watts takes Evans-Wentz's approach with reservations he says, detecting a distinct theosophical bias with its emphasis on the individual rebirth. He criticizes Evans-Wentz for diverging with information about a myriad of other forms of spirituality old and new. Watts points out that individuality is not stressed by Buddhism, but instead the concept that we are all part of One Mind (alayavijnana).[38] NDEs do focus on the individual and individual salvation, as this fits with the underlying Christian structure of the phenomenon.[39] Western individualism informs both life and death! Westerners cannot assume that these assumptions about individuality are present in Tibet in the same way. The point is that in Buddhism the so-called individual is not an individual, that is the point of the illusion. The goal of the Bardo is to discard individuality, and to embrace the real mind of Clear Light, a state of Nirvana that has no such divisions. Unless this realization is achieved then Samsara and suffering continue.[40]

3) The Francesca Fremantle and Chögyam Trungpa version of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo* by Guru Rinpoche.[41]

4) The Dalai Lama XIV's version [42] of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is a popular translation published by Penguin.

5) Popular cultural versions of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*.

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[37] Alan W. Watts, "Book Review: The Tibetan Book of the Dead." *The Journal of Religion* 30, no. 4 (1950): 300.

[38] Watts, "Book Review: Tibetan Book of the Dead." This is the concept of the storehouse consciousness.

[39] Even if Western society has become secularized, the assumptions and structures of the Christian worldview underpin it, even Christianity itself has been formally abandoned by many.

[40] Ole Nydahl, *Fearless Death: Buddhist Wisdom on the Art of Dying* (Buddhismus Stiftung Diamantweg, 2012), 27.

[41] Francesca Fremantle, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead, (Bardo-Thos-Sgrol, Engl.) The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo: The Great Liberation through Hearing in the Bardo by Guru Rinpoche according to Karma Lingpa* (Shambhala, 1975).

[42] Dalai Lama, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: First Complete Translation* (Penguin Books, 2014).

In the previous section the links between the use of psychedelics and otherworldly experiences were mentioned. The thesis is that this realm is accessible by various doorways, be that near-death, meditation, psychedelics, breathwork, hypnosis or dreams. A notable contribution is *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on the Tibetan Book of the Dead by* Timothy Leary, Ralph Metzner, and Richard Alpert, who used it as a guidebook for traversing the psychedelic Bardos.[43] On Amazon I discovered a plethora of other books with titles such as '*Uncovering the Mysteries of the Tibetan Afterlife'* or '*Cracking the Code*' or '*Tibetan End of Life Traditions'*. These concise simplistic self-help DIY potted salvation popular publication genre appeal to those who prefer to fill their spiritual appetites from the modern smorgasbord of appealing eclectic ideas taken out of cultural context, fully adaptable to mix and match theologies. This trend continued and developed from the blending and bending of the Theosophists, but hardly delve into the meat fund in the profound teachings of Lamas embedded in lineages and in the oral tradition of Delogs still insulated from the outside world in the Tibetan language.[44]

6) *The Illustrated Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Stephen Hodge and Martin Boord.[45]

7) Alternative but related texts: The '*Tibetan Book of the Dead'*[46] has found its way into pop culture and comics. [47] The movie *Jacob's Ladder* 1990 was inspired by the writer Bruce Joel

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[43] Timothy Leary, Richard Alpert, and Ralph Metzner. *The Psychedelic Experience: A Manual Based on The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Citadel, 2017).

[44] Izzy W. Casey, *Discover the Secrets of Tibetan Afterlife: A Beginner's Guide: UnVeiling the Mysteries of the Tibetan Afterlife: Your Complete Introductory Handbook for Spiritual Exploration* (Independently published,2024).

[45] Stephen Hodge, *The Illustrated Tibetan Book of the Dead: a New Translation with Commentary* (Sterling Publ., 1999).

[46] Bardo Thödol refers to the original text, whereas I prefer to use the term Tibetan Book of the Dead for Western derivatives and translations from Evans-Wentz's translation.

[47] Vine, Spirit. "Comic Book Guide to the Tibetan Buddhist Afterlife." Spirit Vine Ayahuasca Retreat Center, May 30, 2015. https://spiritvineretreats.com/resources/newsletter/june-2015/comic-book-guide-to-the-tibetan-Buddhist-afterlife/amp/. The art of Thomas Coville.

Rubin's own otherworldly and Buddhist experiences. It is based on a modern Vietnam soldier's journey through the Bardo of his own projection.[48] There is George Saunder's book *Lincoln in the Bardo: A Novel*. [49] There is also Gaspar Noé's *Enter the Void* (2009).[50] Then there is Leonard Cohen's narration of a 1994 documentary on the topic.[51] The Beatles' song "*Tomorrow Never Knows*" was inspired by this book. It also inspired Elisabeth Kubler Ross' book *On Death and Dying* 1969.[52] One of the most brilliant books to emerge is *A Guided Tour of Hell* written by Swedish Dharma teacher, and founder of Shambhala Publications, Samuel Bercholz [53] and illustrated by Pema Mandol Thaye.[54] It is the story of a Bardo Being going through the hell realms, and Bercholz describes it as a memoir, a rendering of an ineffable religious experience he had, so it is not a work of fiction. He descents through the borderlands, sees horrific visions, and then emerges into redemption and rebirth. He has been referred to as an American Delog by Tulku Thondup Rinpoche![55] It is an NDE, for Sam had had a crisis during heart surgery in hospital, and though these visions he was 'reborn.' He saw Bardo Beings still trapped in hot and cold hells, and suffering for eons, who were still so attached to negative habits and emotions that they could not recognize the Bodhisattvas that came to save them. After meeting the kind Buddha of Hell guides him, and a then a goddess called Janna Sophia, of the same essence as the Buddha of Hell, rescues him. He learned that compassion helps the hell beings, and that

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[48] Jacob's Ladder (1990), IMDb, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0099871/.

[49] George Saunders, *Lincoln in the Bardo: A Novel* (Random House, 2017).

[50] Paul B. Donnelly, "Liberation through Seeing: Screening "The Tibetan Book of the Dead." *Religions* 9, no. 8 (2018): 239.

[51] "The Tibetan Book of the Dead: A Way of Life (1994), IMDb, https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0227652/.

[52] Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (The Macmillan Company, 1969).

[53] Drala Mountain Center, "Sam Bercholz - Drala Mountain Center," June 14, 2017, https://www.dralamountain.org/teacher/sam-bercholz/. Recommended website: https://www.dralamountain.org/.

[54] Samuel Bercholz, *A Guided Tour of Hell: A Graphic Memoir* (Shambhala, 2016).

[55] Bercholz, *Guided Tour of Hell*, Note on cover. Tulku Thondup, *Peaceful Death, Joyful Rebirth: A Tibetan Buddhist Guidebook* (Shambhala Publications, 2006).

liberation emerges from perception. Sam's vision was about one of the six reams, the Hell realm, not the Bardo after death. Later in his book he discusses the different realms. This opens the question, do NDEs therefore not access the Bardo after death, but are they simply psychic visits to one of the six realms, as in Sam's case? One could add the Pure Lands to the list of possible destinations.[56] It remains ultimately a mystery.

8) An Important guide to reading the *Bardo Thödol*. - Francesca Fremantle's book *Luminous Emptiness* is a guidebook to the *Bardo Thödol*, in addition to the version of the text that she helped to translate with Chögyam Trungpa.[57] She points out that Westerners often cannot appreciate the *Bardo Thödol* because they lack an understanding go Buddhist concepts. I would add that the transliteration spellings often vary between books when referring to key concepts. Fremantle stresses that one of key takeaways from the *Bardo Thödol* is that "The whole of existence, the entire world of our experience, is appearing and disappearing every moment. Whatever happens to us after death is simply a continuation of what is happening to us now in this life, even though it manifests in unfamiliar ways: as the text says, 'Samsara is reversed, and everything appears as lights and images.'"[58]

Which Versions Do Tibetans Use?

Westerners often assume and take for granted that *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is a) one book b) really important to Tibetans and even their major guide in funerals c) that it is a famous

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[56] See 'Pure Lands' description in Matthew T. Kapstein Tibetan Buddhist Afterlife Beliefs and Funerary Practices. Ch 14 in Moreman, ed. *The Routledge Companion to Death and Dying*,146.

[57] Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness.* She also went to SOAS, University of London, my own alma mater.

[58] Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness,* 7.

in Tibet as it is in the West. While it is an important and significant text, it is a tool. Like many tools, it is used differently in different cultural settings and so its uses in the West are different, and the preconceptions of Westerners coming to it, and the ideas they take away from it are different, because of the cultural lens. Like many texts it can be ready at different intellectual levels and a literal reading might miss tantric symbolisms. For example, as a Child I read C.S. Lewis' Narnia series without realizing that the books were modern Christian parables. A second Western assumption is over elevating the importance of text over oral tradition. In Eastern spirituality art and narrative often take precedence over text and indeed reach the ears of more people. So, in the Tibetan case, of comparing the afterlife to NDEs it is to the oral traditions of NDErs or Delogs, or oral lineage teachings handed down between monks, that hold more sway that *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. Lastly, Tibetan ideas of the Bardos and the afterlife as I discuss them are a generalization because different lineages, branches, and schools of philosophy might offer slightly different explanations of the Bardos.

The canonization and institutionalization of texts in the West is not replicated in the East, so nuances and complexities are to be expected. Paul B. Donnelly makes an important understatement that *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is not as important to Tibetans as Westerners, who focus on this text, assume. [59] Just because it has had a cultural impact and gained importance in the West does not mean that Tibetans hold it in similar regard. It is not that it is unimportant in Tibetan Buddhism, but it is one of many versions and alternative texts, and it is not recited in English in the ritual! It is used as well as read differently. The most important take away here is to understand is that while in the west we focus on one *Tibetan Book of The Dead*,

[59] Paul B. Donnelly, "Liberation through Seeing: Screening the Tibetan Book of the Dead." *Religions* 9, no. 8 (2018): 239.

there are in fact many versions from different origins. It is only one of a whole genre of similar ritual texts meant to be read at a funeral. Most Tibetan monks in Tibet will say they are familiar with the *Bardo Thödol*, but then produce completely different prayers and recitations, not the Karma Lingpa one. "It was clear first of all that the Tibetan phrase *Bardo Thödol (bar-do thos-grol),* " liberation upon hearing in the Bardo," meant something entirely different to me than it did to the Tibetans… For most of them the title referred generally to any doctrine that had the Bardo as its main focus, and particularly any doctrine intended to assuage the fear and anxiety of those destined to travel in the Bardo."[60]

Fremantle does not explain away the images as unreal imaginary allegories or reduce them to psychological archetypes. She accepts the deities as the living presence of the awakened state. In other words, *Bardo Thödol* is not fantasy. [61] It describes a real process. To explain; even if the visions seen in the Bardos is a mind projection, there is another reality interacting with the Bardo Being that also that has an independent reality, coming from the nature of mind itself…it is mind within mind without a dualistic division between real and not real. The *Dharmakaya* does exist, it is everything that exists, and it can appear in other forms according to the *trikaya* doctrine. She presents the historical background to the *Bardo Thödol* and explains that it is part of a larger body of terma of Karma Lingpa referred to as *Profound Dharma of Self-liberation through the Intention of the Peaceful and Wrathful Ones.*[62] She then explains philosophical doctrines such as liberation, consciousness, conditioning, *Samsara*, emptiness, karma, wisdom,

[60] Cuevas, *Hidden History Tibetan,* 212.
[61] Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness*, 7.
[62] Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness*, 20.

and non-self.[63] She defines liberation in a novel way."[64] So when we ask who is liberated, it is not the self. Liberation is not *of* the self but *from* the self."[65] As for the flow of consciousness she says, "We have seen that in the Buddhist view a living being consists of a continuous flow of moments of consciousness, and this flow continues on a subtle level after the death of the physical body. We have also seen, in the diagram of the wheel of life, that the. physical and the nonphysical are inseparably intertwined: mind and matter originate from the same source."[66] Fremantle mentions another key text attributed to Padmasambhava called Natural Liberation[67] Both this text and the *Bardo Thödol* cover teachings on the six Bardos. Fremantle describes the six Bardos in detail which she says represent modes of consciousness.[68] Then she launches into a detailed description and evaluation of the significant of the appearance of the deities that appear in visions. E.g. the five Buddhas (*tathagatas*)[69] represent the five interdependent skandhas, Akshobhya represents form.[70] They represent our own Buddha Nature and different aspects of enlightenment.[71] According to Fremantle from the ultimate viewpoint, there is no distinction between Samsara and enlightenment.[72] She is uncomfortable talking about a universal cosmic mind, behind the Dharmata, but translates mind as space, and says it is vast and limitless and cannot be personified or deified. It is also the Luminosity of our own basic nature.[73]

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[63] Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness*, 20-45.

[64] The Bardo Thödol used in ritual recitation, is one of various methods of liberation. She teaches that there are other ways of liberation through hearing, such as sight (seeing sacred objects/art) sound (mantras), touch (sacred tantric partner) or taste (sacred pills, ambrosia). Also, by *Phowa*. see Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness*, 51.

[65] Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness*, 37.

[66] Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness*, 43.

[67] Padmasambhava. *Natural Liberation: Padmasambhava's Teachings on the Six Bardos* (Simon and Schuster, 1998). This is used frequently instead of the Bardo Thödol and which is taught by Lama Les Collins and the lineage of Gyatrul Rinpoche.

[68] Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness*, 67.

[69] The five tathagatas: Vairochana, Akshobhya, Ratnasambhava, Amitabha, and Amoghasiddhi.

[70] Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness*, 98.

[71] Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness*, 111.

[72] Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness*, 96.

[73] Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness*, 200, 222.

Tibetan Context of the Text

According to tradition, the *Bardo Thödol* was hidden by Padmasambhava in order that it could be revealed at the most appropriate time in history when it could provide guidance. It could be argued that the West needed its message, even if it reached them as an imperfect translation in 1927. Both Mormonism and Tibetan Buddhism share the ability to receive and incorporate authoritative 'revelation' to enrich the canon. In the Tibetan context this function is fulfilled by *terma* texts or religious "treasures" *(gter-ma).* Those that discover them are called tertons. Highly esteemed historical Lamas are said to have hidden secret texts that will only be discovered when the time is right. The *Bardo Thödol* is such a text, reputed to have been written by Padmasambhava, the Lotus Guru, in the 8th century CE, and discovered by the terton Karma Lingpa in the 14th century. It is a section of a larger group of texts known as the famous funeral liturgy of Karma Lingpa's *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* tradition.[74] These might be tiny scraps of paper that the terton can expand into a larger religious text, perfectly revealed suited for the needs of that time. This reminds me of the translation of the golden tablets by Joseph Smith, with use of the hat to help in the translation of scared scripture. Karma Lingpa was associated with a Kagyu tradition close to Gampopa's monastery in Southern Tibet.[75] Although texts have always existed in Tibet and Indian texts have been translated into Tibetan, many monks could not read

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[74] Cuevas, *Hidden History Tibetan*, 18. He says the intermediate state was not explicitly taught by the Buddha. There are similarities between the Hindu *pitriloka* and the bardo after death. The AbhiDharmakosa proposes an intermediate state with four stages birth, before death, death and after death. This is called doctrine of the four "existences" *(bhava)*.

[75] The Treasury of Lives, "Daklha Gampo," n.d., https://treasuryoflives.org/institution/Daklha-Gampo (accessed June, 18, 2024).

in these periods and most knowledge was handed down as a verbatim oral tradition within monasteries.[76]

Prayer, ritual and practice were more highly esteemed than reading.[77] Even today empowerments, or the receiving of teachings from the Lama or guru, is the preferred method of spiritual progress. When I attended the virtual teachings the Great Liberation by Hearing from Gar Drolma Learning and Meditation Center and studied under Khenpo Samdup Rinpoche, the last lesson was the empowerment or 'lung transmission' where an invisible sort of blessing was transmitted to us all from our guru.[78] My point is that even if one owns all the copies of the *Bardo Thödol*, and read them all, it is the practice and practical application of the instructions in them that is important, not the intellectual appreciation of a theory. Cuevas teaches that the transmission of religious ideas in Tibet was not just linear down one line of lineage transmission, but was spread out sideways across the country, being fluid and dynamic and resulting in slight nuances and alteration according to traditions. This has resulted in a genre of death texts.[79] The *Bardo Thödol*, and Karma Lingpa's *Self-Liberated Wisdom Peaceful and Wrathful Deities,* and similar texts have accompanying rituals which are conducted at the time of death in a community and are part of a funeral ritual practice. Some of these ither texts remain untranslated and virtually unknown in English language circles.

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[76] Cuevas, *Hidden History Tibetan*, 19. Cuevas remarks that writing was relatively scarce in Tibet in early periods compared to modern times, and only after the 18th century did, they proliferate with more abundance of materials. Then oral transmissions were written down.

[77] Likewise, in "Hinduism" ritual, worship, pilgrimage, and religious art, accessible to those who could not read, was always the focus of lived religion.

[78] Gar Drolma Buddhist Learning and Meditation Center, "Great Liberation by Hearing Bardo Teachings - Text and Video - Gar Drolma Buddhist Learning and Meditation Center," January 4, 2023, https://gardrolma.org/great-liberation-by-hearing-bardo-teachings-text-and-video/. "Lung' is similar to the Chinese '*qi*' or '*prana*', an energy force.

[79] Cuevas, *Hidden History Tibetan*, 20.

Tibetan Buddhist Philosophy and Definitions Necessary to Know to Understand the Death Texts[80]

Trying to read *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* without a good foundation in Vajrayana philosophy leads to a superficial understanding so I would recommend reading a simple book such as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead for Beginners*, for a concise but thorough summary.[81] The Tibetan concepts of the afterlife is highly influenced by the way the human body and human 'mind' is defined. Westerners often refer to Vajrayana as a Philosophy of Mind. It is indeed true that monastics spend lifetimes trying to explore their own minds and the nature of mind. Unlike Western dualistic models that contrast one body and one mind, the Tibetan, like the Hindu models, posit that there are several levels of subtle bodies and minds. Also, unlike the typical Western dualism of heaven versus hell, the Eastern models, including the Tibetan posit the existence of multiple realms and existences.

In general, my position is that Tibetan philosophy is more complicated. However, the tendency to make long lists of numbered levels or attributes constrains this complexity to a certain orderliness. Below are basic ideas about the body, the nature of the human make-up and the Bardo realm. It is important to understand these basic terms so that the reader can understand the textual and oral traditions of the afterlife. Remember that the Tibetan concept of death differs from the Western definition. Death is a process that can take several days, after cessation of breathing. Death is also seen not as an ending of life, but merely as a transition into another form of existence.[82] Note that the Tibetan attitude and definition of death is different from the

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[80] See Appendix 5 in this dissertation.

[81] Lama Lhanang and Mordy Levine, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead for Beginners: A Guide to Living and Dying* (Sounds True, 2023).

[82] Ole Nydahl, *Fearless Death: Buddhist Wisdom on the Art of Dying* (Buddhismus Stiftung Diamantweg, 2012), 27.

Western, not only does it occur in stages measured in days, but it is seen only as a natural transition and not as an ending.[83]

In appendix five I have written about the main concepts in Vajrayana philosophy that are required for a proper understanding of *The Tibetan Book of The Dead* and the Delog narratives. These include Tibetan definitions of the composition of the body (five *skandhas*), and the mind aspects (eight forms of consciousness), as well as definitions of a Bardo body entity. There are different definitions of what constitutes reality, e.g., the idea of six Bardos and six realms of existence into which rebirth occurs as well as the Buddha Lands. *Chikhai Bardo, Chönyid Bardo, and Chönyid Bardo* are the crucial Bardos involved in death and rebirth. A full understanding of the three *kayas* and the nature of the *Dharmakaya*, the light seen as soon as one dies, is essential. Understanding the social aspects of preparation for death, the 49-day period of the Bardos after death, and burial customs is also important to know.

The main philosophical idea that is relevant to this dissertation on NDEs is not just the idea that consciousness continues after bodily death, but also claims about the mechanism of perception in all the Bardos that concern perception of reality and consciousness. Human perception is an illusion, and so is all perception in the Bardos after death. This does not mean that what is seen and understood does not exist, it means it does not exist in the way we think it does. The illusory perception is clouded by ego, assumptions, biases, and ignorance. This explains why the Bardos after death might contain images of Buddhas both benign and wrathful, as well as scary and terrible visions. So much of what is seen is self-projected and self-created, as if the mind is reflected back in a mirror. This is crucial to understand. When one breaks

[83] The cycle of nature as seen in agriculture, as a cyclic renewal process, is mirrored in the concept of human reincarnation.

through this delusion and recognizes non-duality, then liberation occurs. It is this Tibetan idea that helps explain why NDERs see different things, why Mormons and Tibetans see different visions, which reflect their mind state. Vajrayana would explain that the process for all humans after death is the same, continued awareness, and that is the constant, not the temporary images and visions that just reflect the mind of the Bardo Being.

This mind-projection phenomenon must be remembered when explaining NDEs. Scientists also study the everyday world, which they assume to be real and solid, but they are almost all oblivious to the nature of perception and reality. Physicists need to cultivate Tibetan perspectives and avoid analyzing illusions! Psychologists need to be aware of other complex non-Western definitions of self. Bias and assumptions need to be analyzed before other forms of analysis are undertaken. Richard H. Jones argues that Buddhist expertise is valuable in understanding consciousness and theories of the mind.[84]

Synopsis of The Bardo Thödol The *Bardo Thödol* is read to the dying and the deceased because it is believed that most of the dead cannot guide themselves. This text originates in the Nyingma (*rNying ma*) lineage and carried concepts rooted in the ancient Yogacara philosophy. It is part of an esoteric tradition known as Dzogchen (*rDzogs chen*). [85] A Lama might read at the home of the deceased but can also read from far away, since distance is no barrier here. Bardo rituals attempt to purify the sins or karma of the deceased, and recite the specific prayers,

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[84] Richard H. Jones, *Piercing the Veil: Comparing Science and Mysticism as Ways of Knowing Reality* (Jackson Square Books, 2010), 83-84.

[85] Casey Alexandra Kemp, "Tibetan Book of the Dead (*Bardo Thödol*)."Oxford Research Encyclopedias online, Published 2016, https://oxfordre.com/religion/display/10.1093/acrefore/9780199340378.001.0001/acrefore-9780199340378-e-200?d=%2F10.1093%2Facrefore%2F9780199340378.001.0001%2Facrefore-9780199340378-e-200&p=emailAop7v9mcoQBBw.

mantras, and directions to the deceased. These directions help the deceased Bardo Being navigate the Bardo.

This idea that the ritual actions of the living can affect the dead is found both in Tibetan Buddhism and in Mormonism, in the Temple ordinances. Transference of merit to the dead and rituals to purify their karma is part of Tibetan funerary customs.

> Hey, noble one! Now you have arrived at what is called "death." You are going from this world to the beyond. You are not alone; it happens to everyone. You must not indulge in attachment and insistence on this life. Though you are attached and you insist, you have no power to stay, you will not avoid wandering in this life cycle. Do not lust! Do not cling! Be mindful of the Three Jewels! [86]

One of the best sources for understanding the *Bardo Thödol* is *Secret doctrines of the Tibetan books of the Dead* by Detlef Ingo Lauf.[87] When reading this ancient text, unless one has an academic background understanding one will miss key implications and teachings and misunderstands the symbols. There is both an exoteric and esoteric reading of most tantric texts. The contents of the visions in the *Bardo Thödol* are incredibly detailed and complex, as ca be seen from Lauf's page long list of contents listing the names of all the deities and related topics. Lauf agrees with most other commentators that the visions in the Bardo are reflections of the viewers' internal mind state and spiritual level. The visions are not meant to be taken literally but symbolically. Lauf comments, "The value of the psychic individuation attained by the individual human life in its Earthly body will be received again in the Bardo realm beyond, nothing more and nothing less…that is the unequivocal law of karma."[88]

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[86] Robert Thurman, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Liberation Through Understanding in the Between* (Bantam, 1993), 131-133.

[87] Detlef Ingo Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan Books of the Dead* (Shambhala, 1977).

[88] Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan,* ix.

Lauf compares the genre of Tibetan writings like the *Bardo Thödol* to the tradition of the Ars Moriendi which share the purpose of guiding the dead in the afterlife.[89] He adds that soul guidance has always been a major part of Tibetan religions.[90] Lousie Childs describes the dilemma of the Bardo decisions and reactions: "On the one hand, it is especially volatile, rendering one who undergoes it vulnerable, and potentially distressed. On the other, it is more open to the possibility of personal transformation."[91] She adds, "The intermediate state is distinguished by its dream-like quality, wherein freedom from the gross body is combined with greatly heightened mental powers, enabling consciousness to travel at will, and to communicate its own nature to individuals in the form of intense visions." [92]

Bardo Thödol Contents As the elements of the body dissolve at death visions, colors and sounds are heard. Then at death there is blackness and brief period of unconsciousness. This is followed by the vision of the Clear Light and usually this is missed. Then the visions of the intermediate state begin and continue for seven weeks.

All the various translations differ in their language formality, but I chose to outline Robert Thurman's version.[93] He provides background, and history, followed by Tibetan philosophical definitions about the realms and mind-body definitions, then the preparation for dying and the stages of dying. Then he lists prayers used for the dying. In chapter six he gives he translation.[94] The *Tibetan Book of the Dead* translation includes The Clear Light, The deity visions appear on each of the twelve days, and then there are encounters with the Lord of Death.

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[89] *Ars moriendi* [The Art of Dying] are two 15th century Latin texts that detail how to have a good death.

[90] Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan*, 1.

[91] Louise Child, *Tantric Buddhism and Altered States of Consciousness: Durkheim, Emotional Energy, and Visions of the Consort* (Routledge, 2016), 70.

[92] Child, *Tantric Buddhism,* 71. -- Also Lati Rinbochay, Jeffrey Hopkins, and Elizabeth Napper. *Death, Intermediate State and Rebirth in Tibetan Buddhism* (Snow Lion, 1985).

[93] Thurman, Tibetan Book of the Dead.

[94] Thurman, Tibetan Book of the Dead, 117.

It describes how to navigate rebirth on Earth, by recognizing the best womb to enter based on lights. E.g., Earth has a blue light. After this are supplementary notes and appendices. The reader will notice that each paragraph providing guidance is addressed to "Hey Noble One!" followed by advice and directions concerning what to do if certain things are seen or heard. It is a map, and a guide aimed at the best possible outcome, liberation, or rebirth, written to be recited from the lama to the deceased.

Appendix 4 lists teachings from the Buddhist Sources i) *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* [95]and ii) The Poetry of Robert Aho, a Western Tibetan Buddhist Delog. Having understood the metaphysical concepts from Tibetan Buddhism, the reader can read the text of the *Bardo Thödol* from better perspective. This context was missing from the early 20th century readings and filled in by Theosophical and Western Esoteric philosophy given the gap in understanding. What stands out from these passages is that the Bardo Being is addressed as a 'person' "O Child" and the direct instructions given to "you." Technically, and in philosophy, the Bardo Being's separateness is an illusion, but for the sake of practical appearances and given the feeling that humans have that they are entities, the being is addressed as a separate being. The goal however is to shed this illusion and integrate into awareness without such a personal identity. This list of choice topics is an example of the contents of the *Bardo Thödol*, in one of the better translations. Each aspect of Vajrayana philosophy and conceptions of consciousness and awareness are reflected in the text. Not that the overall theme is the illusion of self and how the interplay with the 'real' nature of conscious awareness determines the outcome of rebirth.

i) Ignorance and delusion

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[95] Karma-gliṅ-pa, Padma Sambhava, and Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead [English Title]: The Great Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate States [Tibetan Title]*, Edited by Graham Coleman and Thupten Jinpa. Translated by Gyurme Dorje, Penguin Classics deluxe edition (Penguin, 2007).

ii) The Nature of Reality in Vajrayana

iii) Taking Refuge in the Buddha - *Dharmakaya*

iv) Release of attachments before death.

v) Emotions and Fear in the Bardo after death.

vi) Karma's effects and state of Mind's importance.

viii) Nature of Mind

ix) Pure awareness.

x) Appearances and Mind.

xi) The Nature of Appearances

xii) Consciousness transference discussed (*phowa*)

xiii) Instructions about that will be seen and how to respond are given to the "Child of Buddha Nature":

xiv) Light

xv) What arises over a series of days is described (red, green lights etc.…each with an opportunity for liberation. It describes the five Buddha families and 42 deities of the Buddha bodies.

xvi) The meaning of Dull lights

xvii) Example of the different appearances on different 'days' in the Bardo.

xviii) Recite the following aspirational prayer:

xix) Obstruction of the womb entrances and the lights.

xx) Instructions to Meditate on one's personal deity are suggested.

xxi) The oral teaching for the method which obstructs the person who is to enter the womb, is as follows:

xxiii) Choosing a womb entrance

xxiv) When you see these, you can control and reverse the direction of your progress. (instructions to choose the best place of rebirth)

xxv) Rebirth realms

xxvi) Choosing a womb for rebirth

xxvi) Choosing a womb for rebirth

xxvii) Directions to Buddha Lands.

xxviii) Rebirth

xxix) Rebirth and choice.

xxx) Affirmations and Prayers during rebirth.

xxxi) The Aspirational Prayer which Protects from Fear of the Intermediate States

xxxii) Prayer.

Other Bardo Texts Many contemporary Tibetan Buddhist texts offer guidance to the dying. Some are used in the modern hospice movement. One example is *The Bardo Guidebook* 1991 by Chokyi Nyima which focuses on the four Bardos related to death.[96] These teachings are based on another esteemed and classic 17th century Tibetan text *The Mirror of Mindfulness.*[97] While the *Bardo Thödol* describes six Bardos this text concentrate on four Bardos, consolidating the Bardos of Dreaming and Meditation into the Bardo of this Life.[98] Tsele Natsok Rangdrol explains how the Bardos appear to an ordinary person who has never practiced, how they appear

[96] Chökyi Nyima, *The Bardo Guidebook* (Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 1991).

[97] Rangdrol, Tsele Natsok. *The Mirror of Mindfulness: The Cycle of the Four Bardos* (Rangjung Yeshe Publications, 2010). Tsele Natsok Rangdro (1608-1677)

[98] The natural bardo of this life, the painful bardo of dying, the luminous bardo of Dharmata, and the karmic bardo of becoming.

to a practitioner who has some degree of experience, and how these Bardos appear to a person who has perfected the practice.[99] It is imperative to realize that what seems real is unreal and all is impermanent and not to be deceived by sensory appearances. What strikes me is that science is based on observation and appearance through the senses and mind. In a way this is a form of illusion because the physical world is not as solid as it seems, it is really empty! Perhaps that is why science, focused on the superficial material reality, still cannot understand awareness and consciousness. The world has no true independent existence or substance. It is as impermanent, unstable, and changeable as our 'bodies.'

The Six Yogas (or Dharmas) of Naropa is another key text, [100] which still inspires modern renditions such as Lama Yeshe's F.P.M.T. version.[101] The *Six Yogas* are: mystic heat (*tum-mo, gtum mo*), radiant Clear Light (*ö-sel, 'od gsal*), illusory body (*gyu-lu, sgyu lus*), dream state (*mi-lam, rmi lam*), intermediate state (Bardo), and transference of consciousness (*phowa, 'pho ba*). All of these are related to the Bardo state, and the text teaches the reader about how to practice these *Yogas* so that they can navigate the Bardo after death. The text is found in the Kagyu lineage of Tilopa, Naropa and Marpa who lived in the 11th century CE.[102]

Formal teachings versus the individual experiences of Delogs. (*'das-log*) [103]

The Tibetan Book of the Dead describes the intermediate state, but it represents a textual tantric tradition rather than the personal stories and secondary source hagiographies of

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[99] Nyima, *Bardo Guidebook*, 33.

[100] Tulku Ringu, *Six Yogas of Naropa* (n.p.,1982).

[101] Thubten Yeshe, *The Bliss of Inner Fire: Heart Practice of the Six Yogas of Naropa* (Simon and Schuster, 1998). F.P.M.T. is the Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition.

[102] Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan,* 18.

[103] Sogyal Rinpoche, Patrick Gaffney, and Andrew Harvey. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. Vol. 19. (Rider, 1992), 331.

individuals who have died and returned. The latter are closer to reports of NDEs. This genre is called 'Delog Stories', and it is more of an oral tradition shared by laypeople who in general have traditionally been less literate and educated. Their lived religion would have focused on this type of story as a bearer of beliefs. They would have had contact with funerary texts recited by Lamas and religious specialists but would not have studied these texts themselves. These stories overlap with other stories of ghosts and spirit possessions.[104] Delog means 'returned from death.' While NDErs generally are near death's door for minutes these Delogs are said to be unconscious for days before miraculously reviving.[105] Alyson Prude has studied the gendered nature of this Delog role.[106] Her ethnographic work demonstrates the power dynamics of the female voice and the social impact of their call for others to adopt ethical behaviors and live according to the Dharma. Unlike nuns, Delogs are not competing in the power and authority of male dominated monastic lineages.[107] Lamas still have more power. Prude says that. "Indeed, when we compare *Delogs* to male figures, such as lamas, we notice the limits of a *Delog*'s abilities. Lamas can rescue a consciousness from hell and deliver it to a Pure Land, but Delogs are unable to help those whose sufferings they witness in the lower realms."[108]

I once met a Lama connected to a Professor at the University of the West, and he described returning and healing a woman who was on the brink of death from cancer. Delogs however keep more to the role of the dakinis, as messengers, observers, and supporters of the

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[104] Tanya Zivkovic. *Death and Reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism: In-between Bodies* (Routledge, 2014), xv. -- "a renowned local Tibetan lama passed away and later 'returned' to the village as a migrating presence that reigned in the body of a young woman." This lama still had a mental presence but lacked a physical body, so he borrowed one by possession in order to 'teach.'

[105] Without medical science it is hard to say much about the physical state of delogs during their experiences. It could be a coma or similar state.

[106] M. Alyson Prude, "Women Returning from Death: The Gendered Nature of the Delog Role." *Revue d'Etudes Tibétaines*.36 (2016): 69.

[107] Prude, Women Returning Death, 75.

[108] Prude, Women Returning Death, 78.

Dharma, but without an active role. Not all Delogs are women, but the vast majority are. This contrasts with the balanced gender statistics of NDErs. Prude says that "Female bodies, possessing open and expanded energy channels, are therefore more conducive to Delog experiences than male bodies which have more constricted pathways."[109] Another point is that these Delogs often are not limited to one otherworldly journey, but on certain dates make repeat visits.[110] They often have a reputation as village clairvoyant psychics or divinators, called *khandroma*s, who also can predict where the recently decreased will be reborn.[111] They have the ability to control their minds leaving and reentering their body in a sort of OBE.[112] Lee Bailey also discusses how when Delogs rise up out of their bodies they do not recognize their body below as belonging to them,[113] a common OBE report in the West too which is in my data. Lee adds that *Delogs* are a bridge between NDEs and shamanic practices.[114] Lee also corroborates the reports of them being guided through various realms, including to the Hell realm to meet The Lord of Death.

The most prominent ethnographer to study Delogs was the French scholar Françoise Pommaret.[115] Pommaret retells the Delog story of - *Chos 'dzom ("Chonzom") (c.1650) who* reported her seven-day journey while 'dead', seeing the hells and all the paradises.[116] Pommaret studied both dead and living Delogs. Lee remarks that, "Comparing the *Delog* and the Near-Death Experience, Pommaret outlined a typology of the *Delog* adventure that can be contrasted

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[109] Prude, Women Returning Death, 72.

[110] Françoise Pommaret, Les Revenants de l'Au-Delà dans le Monde Tibétain: Sources Littéraires et Tradition Vivante. (Éd. du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1989).

[111] Prude, Women Returning Death, 76-78.

[112] Prude, Women Returning Death, 80.

[113] Lee W. Bailey, "A "Little Death": The Near-Death Experience and Tibetan Delogs." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 19 (2001): 139-159.

[114] Bailey, Little Death, 140.

[115] Pommaret, Les Revenants de l'Au-Delà.

[116] Pommaret, Revenants de L'Au-Delà, 141.

with many typical elements of the contemporary Western near-death experience."[117] First Delogs take a while to realize that they are out of their bodies, and then there is contact with the other world. There is a guide, a description of the realms, perhaps a meeting with a relative, friend, personal *yidam* [118] or with the Lord of the Dead, a moral message is given to be delivered upon return to life.[119] Yama's warning seems to be the main point of the Delog journey, which is not a personal individualistic trip to one's own salvation or enlightenment, as in an NDE.

The Delog literature and oral tradition is clearly an understudied genre. Pommaret concluded that Delogs are actual persons rather than folk tales.[120] I can appreciate the shamanic element to these reports, which come close to Bon, and Central Asian altered states of shamanic journeying.[121] It also reminds me of the knowledge attained in Ayahuasca ceremonies. I speculate that Delogs might use meditative methods, rather than psychedelic potions, to reach similar realms. Joan Halifax, former wife of Stanislav Grof, who has spent her life working on death and consciousness states about shamanism, that it, "embraces the experience of death, resurrection and realization or illumination.... Variations on the fundamental themes of death and rebirth are found in all mythological traditions, and an encounter with death and release into rebirth are immutable dimensions of most personal religious experiences.[122] I agree with Halifax and also see the similarities between Delog and NDE narratives.

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[117] Bailey, Little Death, 18.

[118] A deity one works with in meditation practice that helps to lead the practitioner to awakening.

[119] Bailey, Little Death, 148-152 -- Pommaret, 1989, 32.

[120] Bailey, Little Death, 152.

[121] Michael J. Harner, Jeffrey Mishlove, and Arthur Bloch. *The Way of the Shaman* (Harper & Row, 1990). Michael J. Harner, *Hallucinogens and Shamanism* (Oxford U. Press, 1973). Reginald A. Ray, "Tibetan Buddhism as Shamanism?" *The Journal of Religion.* 95, 4 (1995): 90-101.

[122] Joan Halifax, *Shamanic Voices: A Survey of Visionary Narratives* (Arkana/Penguin. 1979), 4.

The most comprehensive book about Delogs is Bryan Cuevas' *Travels in the Netherworld* (2008).[123] It details the history of Delogs and first European encounters with the tradition. It also focuses on this tradition as lived religion by ordinary people, which might explain some discrepancies from this type of faith from the authoritative texts.[124] Their narratives have a typical plot, which is describes as being like a traveler's tale filled with vivid and often autobiographical features. Thus, they are different from typical Buddhist hagiographies.[125] Cuevas tell the stories of four Delogs: two laywomen, Lingza Chokyi and Karma Wangzin, a lama, called Jampa De´lek, and a monk called Jangchup Senge.[126] The women are uneducated whereas the men are educated and exercise power in society but despite this polarization their experiences are not so divided. As for drawing comparison to NDEs, Cuevas advises caution and hesitation to draw speedy conclusions from direct comparisons because they ignore details and differences between cultures and religious traditions. [127]

Historical Delogs Famous historical Delogs include: Lhame Lhamchung (*Lha mo lham gcung*),[128] and Lingza Chokyi, 16th century who did not recognize her dead body and thought a pig was in her bed and who could not understand why her family did not see her.[129] She crossed a bridge and entered the hell realms, to meet Yama, Lord of the Dead.[130] He sent her back to the land of the living with a message of repentance. Delog Ling Zha Chodron[131] is another example

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[123] Bryan J. Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld: Buddhist Popular Narratives of Death and the Afterlife in Tibet* (Oxford University Press, 2008).

[124] Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld,* 10.

[125] Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld,* 12.

[126] Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld,* 14.

[127] Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld,* 16.

[128] Prude, Women Returning Death, 72.

[129] Sogyal, *Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, 330-331.

[130] Yama is shared in Hindu traditions. The idea of a bridge is present in Zoroastrianism also.

[131] The Tibetan Library of Works and Archives in Dharamsala houses at least a dozen various *delog* accounts.

although sources of her experiences are difficult to research in English. Many Delog accounts remain unwritten and remain in oral tradition, folklore, and local narratives. Thomas Shor who wrote *A step Away from Paradise* 2011 writes about several Delogs.[132] He examines tales of hidden mystical valley kingdoms hidden in the Himalayas such as Shangri-la and Beyul[133] Demoshong. In 1962 a *terton* called Tulshuk Lingpa and three hundred others tried to find Demoshong near Mt. Kanchenjunga in Sikkim but failed. One can enter these otherworldly places without dying but the irony is that Tulshuk actually died in an avalanche and failed to reach his destination in his body. The physical and spiritual tend to lap over and merge in these tales.

Modern Delogs Not all Delogs are historical, some are still alive. One is Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, and another is Dawa Drolma. [134] There is Kunzang in Golok also who was interviewed by Alyson Prude. Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche's experience is similar to a modern NDE but not expressed using this label.

***Delog Dawa Drolma* (1906-1941)** Delog Dawa Drolma would tell audiences all about her otherworldly journeys into other realms, some beautiful and others hellish. Her words were recorded in a written account which was later brought West by her daughter and translated. She possessed psychic powers and could find lost items for people. In her otherworldly journeys she met people she knew, and dead relatives, even though technically they ought not be in the Bardo realms after 49 days, so had to be in other worlds, ones she did not name. During one of such

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[132] Thomas K. Shor, *A Step Away from Paradise: The True Story of a Tibetan Lama's Journey to a Land of Immortality* (City Lion Press, 2017).

[133] A 'Beyul' is a mystical hidden valley, and such places are established by Padmasambhava and guarded by otherworldly beings. according to Nyingma beliefs.

[134] Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, *In Love with the World: A Monk's Journey Through the Bardos of Living and Dying*. (Random House. 2019). Delog Dawa Drolma, *Delog: Journey to Realms Beyond Death* (Padma Pub, 1995).

trips her body lay as if dead, in a comatose state for five days. Her consciousness was guided and escorted by the wisdom goddess White Tara.[135] Drolma gain spiritual authority. Her accounts are "as vivid as that of a tourist describing a country he or she has visited,"[136] When she died rainbows appeared and five vultures symbolic of a realized yogini, circled overhead. She said when she laid down, she experienced a state of sheer lucidity and a blissful state of mind:

> I beheld the exalted and venerable Tara actually present before me within a mass of rainbow light, her form white like a vase of crystal." From the direction of the Mountain of Glory on the subcontinent of Chamara, a rainbow of five parallel bands of colored light penetrated my meditation room. Along this pathway came an escort of four young women dressed in silks and adorned with ornaments of bone… They placed me in a litter covered with variegated silk… My mind expanded into a supremely blissful state, the essential nature of sheer lucidity in which I could not cling to anything as good or bad in the ordinary sense, like unborn space that is nothing at all in and of itself, yet with an absolutely unimpeded natural radiance. This harmonious and spontaneous meditative experience emerged as the inconceivable array of a cloud mandala, the entire vast range of pure experience.[137] I then had the sensation of climbing higher and higher into vaguely defined space, more swiftly than a wild white-tailed vulture soaring into the heavens. As this dramatic experience unfolded like a shifting phantasmagoria, I suddenly found myself in a place that I did not recognize. In the center of a vast plain, so spacious and ethereal that it seemed the sky had fallen to the Earth, stood a large rock face shaped like a heart. In every direction were mountains like weapons thrusting up into the sky, red as though sprinkled with blood. In the sky appeared a canopy of five-colored rainbow light. Peacocks, thrushes, and cuckoos soared and flitted about playfully.
> The air was filled with the sweet fragrance of an incense that had the power to transform one's perceptions. Covering the ground in all directions were flowers of five lovely hues-white, yellow, red, green, and blue. Drolma said that she experienced this realm as an actual place.[138]

This experience shares similarities with some NDE accounts, such as being taken by guides to a place filled with beauty. Like VTEs she feels that is a real and solid place, not a

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[135] Drolma, *Journey to Realms,* vii.

[136] Drolma, *Journey to Realms,* lx.

[137] The cloud imagery expresses the vast and ethereal quality of her experience. In Buddhist cosmology, our world system consists of a central mountain surrounded by four major continents, each of which is flanked on either side by minor continents, or subcontinents. The subcontinent to the Southwest of the Central Mountain and West of our world (the "Southern Continent") is Chamara. Padmasambhava resides there, subduing a race of bloodthirsty demons that would otherwise overrun our world.

[138] Drolma, *Journey to Realms,* 8-10.

dream or mental construction. Her story continues with descriptions of the Copper Mountain. [139] She says she saw "The Temple, an emanation of Padmasambhava's enlightened awareness, was fashioned of five kinds of precious jewels, a self-arising and spontaneously accomplished mandala."[140] She meets different people and *dakinis* (sky-dancers, enlightened divine female messengers) and then in a mansion she meets the deity Vajravarahi, [141] whose hair was bound up with silk ribbons the color of the sky, and she held a small text of spiritual instructions. She was reciting the root verses of the *Intermediate State after Death.* [142] In another mansion she meets another goddess. VTEs also describe mansions. She meets Yeshe Tsogyel, consort of Padmasambhava and other yogis and enlightened beings sitting on huge thrones. Then she meets her paternal uncle Khakyod Wangpo. Then Tara displayed the hell realms to her, and they were terrifying. There was Dharmaraja (also called Yama, Lord of Death) who found Drolma to be virtuous.[143] He sent her back to life with instructions to warn humans to live a life full of good actions and compassion.[144] She also recounts visiting Yulokod, the realm of Tara, full of flowers, jewels, gold and silver, lotuses, wish granting trees and pavilions.[145] She saw those who had practiced the Dharma in the Bardos, happy and content, but those who had done evil suffering. She also carried back messages from the dead to the living and requests for the living to do

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[139] This is the pure land of Padmasambhava. Jigme Lingpa, *The Copper-Colored Mountain: Jigme Lingpa on Rebirth in Padmasambhava's Pure Land*. (Shambhala Publications, 2022).

[140] Drolma, *Journey to Realms,* 10.

[141] A reference to the common Tibetan custom of offering a scarf of white cloth to a teacher when requesting an audience or a formal transmission of spiritual teachings. Symbolic of one's pure sincerity, the scarf is often placed back around one's neck by the teacher as a blessing. Derge served as the major cultural and administrative center of eastern Tibet. The dakini referred to here was an actual woman who lived before Dawa Drolma's time.

[142] Part of a cycle of terma teachings, some of which have been translated into English as the *Tibetan Book of the Dead.* Drolma, *Journey to Realms,* 13.

[143] Drolma, *Journey to Realms,* 41-98.

[144] Drolma, *Journey to Realms,* 132.

[145] Drolma, *Journey to Realms,* 115.

virtuous actions to relieve the deceased, which is reminiscent of NDE accounts and work by the living to help the dead.[146] Dawa Drolma, it could be argued had an NDE.

Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche's book is even more recent and is a very moving personal autobiography of how he suffered and fell ill when on a personal retreat of solitude in India in 2011 to find spiritual growth as a monk. Although not a classical mystical Delog, he did come so close to death that he experienced the Bardo of the Dharmata and then returned. He almost died from living rough and eating poor quality food. He had been a well-known and respected 36-year-old Kagyu abbot and had lived in comfort before venturing out, literally eloping 'awol' style from his monastery into the world alone. His book has a questioning style, and he incorporates Buddhist philosophy.

His first chapter is aptly named: "Who are you?" He questioned his social identity, even his name which is a constructed label, as a good practioner should. Chapter four is about impermanence and death. He was too well dressed, he had to escape from his social personal. He describes sitting in a train to his destination thinking he was psychologically dying to his old life.[147] This is the Bardo of Living. He discusses ego, and letting wisdom arise and cultivating awareness. In chapter six he discusses the Bardos and how to make the most of one's lifetime here and after death. Then he reaches his destination, Varanasi station and soon a visit to the ghats where the dead are cremated by the Ganges, the scared river. He writes: a big question that exists in the West is whether or not something of us continues when we physically die. If we can connect with any aspect of reality that is beyond the normal limits of the thinking mind, then we

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[146] Drolma, *Journey to Realms,* 133.

[147] Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche, *In Love with the World: A Monk's Journey Through the Bardos of Living and Dying* (Random House, 2019), 14. He has Nepalese citizenship.

must ask where this reality comes form, and how it came into existence…. if it has no beginning, then perhaps…it has no ending."[148]

He then takes a bus ride to Gorakhpur where he stays in a guesthouse. He is embarrassed by the positive attention he gets from wearing the maroon robes. He considers taking them off and going near naked wearing only a dhoti wrap, so he can abandon the persona they represent and say goodbye to belonging.[149] His money finished, and he walked away to the PariNirvana Park by the stupa.[150] From now on he was homeless, and he lived by begging with an alms bowl. As a result, very soon, he became ill with digestive issues, diarrhea, and stomach pain.[151] He prepared his mind with the possibility of death and recalled his training and the instructions for dying.[152] On the 5th day of illness he prepared for the worst.[153] He let go he offered up his body to death, released all attachment. He lies down in the graveyard. He began to feel the elements dissolve, feeling a dry mouth, inability to stand. Breathing became hard. His mind became so dull he almost lost consciousness. Then he saw red and white flashes.[154] He narrates his experience:

> "Suddenly boom! Awareness and emptiness became one, indivisible…but the recognition had never been this complete before. …The entire universe opened up and became totally unified with consciousness. The universe was withing me. No me separate from the universe. No direction. No within nor without. No perception or nonperception. No self or non-self. No living, no dying…. The clarity and Luminosity of awareness, beyond concepts, beyond fixed mind- became the sole vehicle of knowing. I was no longer bonded to any sense of a distinct body or mind. No separation existed…no phenomenon existed separate from me…. Perceptions but no perceiver…the top of my had come off…words point to something beyond the conceptual mind.[155]

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[148] Yongey Mingyur, *In Love with the World,* 109.
[149] Yongey Mingyur. *In Love with the World,* 162.
[150] Yongey Mingyur. *In Love with the World,* 169.
[151] Yongey Mingyur. *In Love with the World,* 177.
[152] Yongey Mingyur. *In Love with the World,* 192. On pp. 212-217 he discusses the *bardos*.
[153] Yongey Mingyur. *In Love with the World,* 221.
[154] Yongey Mingyur. *In Love with the World,* 223. There are tantric signs before dying.
[155] Yongey Mingyur. *In Love with the World,* 225-226.

He describes his mind merging with space. He became one with the trees and stars. Every particle was alive with love. The world was love. Everything flowed without barriers. He had clarity beyond ideas and interpretive mind, all seeing. He had no dualistic perception anymore. The cup that had contained empty space had broken, he says. He experiences Luminosity, the union of mother and child, the bliss of love and tranquility.[156] He came back from this experience because he realized his teaching mission as not complete, and his awareness returned to his body. He concluded that he had realized luminous emptiness. He had not died.[157]he describes the experience again. He awoke on a hospital bed not knowing how he got there. (A man had found him and brought him to a hospital.) He now knows from experience now that awareness continues after death. He was open to total reality. Rather than seeing the experience as a 'dream' he now feels living on Earth is like a dream! He understood that this life is not reality.

Pema Chödrön gives a good explanation of Mingyur's NDE experience and explains it in terms of Tibetan metaphysics. One point she mentions is the background awareness of all past memories that is carried by a mindstream through the Bardos and reincarnations. These memories are what I think also occur in in NDE life reviews.[158] She explains that this world is a 'consensus reality,' the relative truth that most humans agree upon, that there are trees etc., but that Buddhism focuses on another level of reality, absolute reality, the experience that Mingyur had. This is shunyata or emptiness, meaning a way of knowing, free and empty from views and opinions, seeing reality as it really is without illusion.[159] This made me wonder if the afterlife

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[156] Yongey Mingyur. *In Love with the World,* 226-227.
[157] Yongey Mingyur. *In Love with the World,* 229, 232-233.
[158] Pema Chödrön, *How We Live is How We Die* (Shambhala Publications, 2022), 31-48.
[159] Chödrön, *How We Live,* 51.

realms are relative or absolute truths? Are they a consensus reality, where those of a certain set of beliefs, find themselves, say in a Bardo, a heaven? Or are the borderlands only like this, and a deeper journey beyond the barrier of no return perhaps a more absolute reality? NDEs seem to contain an element of both. The Spirit World has aspects of a relative consensus, but experiences of the divine and of the *Dharmakaya* contain a meeting with the Absolute Truth, and the Ultimate Reality. These children of God meet Heavenly Father, and the Child Luminosity meets the Mother Luminosity. Yongey Mingyur Rinpoche says, luminous mind "is capable of producing anything, even ignorance of its own nature…. Not recognizing natural mind is simply an example of the mind's unlimited capacity to create."[160] His account is one of the few primary experiential sources in the Tibetan traditions.

This is a classic mystical experience, within a Vajrayana context. His experience reflects his intellectual and educated level and his training in recognizing the Clear Light, whereas illiterate or less educated Delogs might have a slightly different type of experience, more of a passive witness. Most Delogs do not reach enlightenment in their journeys but use their experience to teach the Buddhist path in preparation for death. Prude stresses the importance of the *Delogs* role in the community.[161] The focus with NDEs is more on the person implications of an individual's personal spiritual journey. This reflects difference in what is considered of cultural importance. She meets a modern Delog called Kunzang, who does not have the status of Yongey Mingyur. Her practice is less orthodox. Prude surmises that. "As a result, Delogs retain greater opportunities for personal expression and creativity than their monastic counterparts."[162]

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[160] Lion's Roar, "Resting in Luminosity," June 11, 2024, https://www.lionsroar.com/resting-in-Luminosity/

[161] *Prude, Alyson* and Kunzang Drolkar A *Delog* in Eastern Tibet in Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed. *Eminent Buddhist Women*. (State University of New York Press, 2014), 169-184.

[162] *Prude, Delog* in Eastern Tibet, 172.

Prude reports that Kunzang returns to the Otherworlds irregularly, depending on moon phases and her visits are led and announced by her own personal female deity Drolma, her name for Tara.[163] She claims and believes that she 'dies' when she journeys but it is difficult to know or verify her physiological state for sure. I think it might be a deep meditative trance of some sort, but that is my own conjecture. Of course, remember that the Tibetan definition of death is not the sudden moment of cessation of breath as it is defined in the west. Prude stresses her role as a courier of message from the Otherworlds to the living, often a request for ritual assistance from the living.[164] This function appears in NDE and VTE narratives also. Her visions are full of many details, and she accepts them literally. She sees cities, animals, and the Lord of the Dead.[165] Prude made the connection between the experiences of this Delog and NDEs, but Kunzang says they are not Delogs because they do not carry messages from the Dharma.[166]

Samuel Bercholz Tibetan Buddhist Samuel Bercholz, founder of Shambhala Publications, one of the most famous publishers of Buddhist materials in North America, as mentioned earlier in this chapter openly links his NDE with an experience in the Bardo.[167] Like so many ineffable experiences he chose to use art as an expression of his visions, and he was greatly aided by the Tibetan Illustrator, Pema Namdol Thaye. [168] What is interesting about this Graphic Memoir is the hell fire element, the suffering and the pain witnessed in the visions. This represents a rarer aspect of Western NDEs but follows closely with the Tibetan descriptions of terrifying visions. It is not all negative however, since the outcome and the overall message is

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[163] *Prude, Delog* in Eastern Tibet, 175.
[164] *Prude, Delog* in Eastern Tibet, 176.
[165] *Prude, Delog* in Eastern Tibet, 181.
[166] Prude*, Delog* in Eastern Tibet, 181.
[167] https://www.facebook.com/john.bigbootay.9/. is the Facebook page of Samuel Bercholz.
[168] Bercholz, Samuel. *A Guided Tour of Hell: A Graphic Memoir* (Shambhala, 2016).

one of redemption and rebirth. Sam belongs to the Kagyu and Nyingma lineages, and of course the *Bardo Thödol* is a Nyingma text. While there are some philosophical differences between the four main schools and various lineages of Tibetan philosophy these teachings about death and the Bardo are shared.

Robert Aho Robert Aho similarly chooses an artistic way to express his own 2016 NDE experiences, in this case literary and poetic. He is currently drafting a book about the Bardo. His guru is Padmasambhava and the *Dharmakaya*, the Nature of Mind. His root gurus include Lama Chogyal Namkhai Norbu Rinpoche and Lama Dudjom Dorjee. He converted from Lutheranism to Tibetan Buddhism as a young man. He also publishes on online newsletter that contains his teachings in the form of poems.[169] I have included some of his poems in Appendix 4, part b, at the end of this dissertation called: *Timeless Luminosity, Bardo, Nature of Mind and Quantum Illusion*. These contain themes similar to those found in the *Bardo Thödol*. He also has published two books expressing his NDE and subsequent related Buddhist teachings.[170] As a Dzogchen practitioner he still retains the vivid memories of what he calls "the inexplicable light beyond all limitations."[171] His very is both extremely personal and intense. His book *Timeless Luminosity* contains 112 poetic meditations centering around timeless Luminosity, a realm/state of the *Dharmakaya* light seen at death.[172] His later book Aho did not go further into the *Bardo* than this, he lingered in the moment of facing the light and then returned, as is consistent with general

[169] Robert Aho's Facebook page and website are recommended: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063211900429 ; https://www.timelessLuminosity.com/.

[170] Aho, Robert. *Timeless Luminosity* (Robert Aho, 2020). Aho, Robert. *The Frog: A Spiritual Autobiography, Spanning Many Lifetimes* (Independently published, 2021). His forthcoming book *The Délok*, is not yet published.

[171] Aho, *The Frog*, 2021. Frontmatter

[172] Aho, *Timeless Luminosity,* 2020. Frontmatter.

teachings and those of the Dalai Lama XIV about NDEs.[173] It seems as if he came close to enlightenment, but it certainly was a state of *samadhi* that has left him with a profound and lasting inner peace that is not only life changing for him, but pressing him to teach so others can attain this spiritual level. He attained the memory of his past lives, including a Buddhist one, and the knowledge that the entire universe is reborn in every moment.[174] He speaks online about how this experience 'revealed unlimited potentiality for me', and his personal knowledge that this state of awareness is both blissful and eternal.[175] He explains that his own awakening prompts him to want to awaken others.

Like many NDErs who returned to Earth life because they felt they had a mission to fulfil, Aho says that, "This notion that I must remain until my task is complete may seem somewhat arbitrary; however, that was a sacred promise, or *samaya*, that I made while in the death Bardo, [176]while I was fully engaged in the light of *Dharmakaya*, as I appeared in the energetic condition where consciousness arises."[177] This is his scared Bardo promise as he calls it. He wants so much to return there but needs to carry out his work here in Samsara. He adds. "Look at mind. Meditate as often as you can, looking inwardly for all the blessings and knowledge you will ever need. If you do so, this promise that I made in the death Bardo will

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[173] Dalai Lama XIV, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying: An Exploration of Consciousness with the Dalai Lama*, narrated and ed. Francisco J. Varela, trans. B. Alan Wallace and Thupten Jinpa (Wisdom Publications, 1997). See earlier discussion in this chapter between Joan Halifax and the Dalai Lama. Also in this dissertation when I refer to the Dalai Lama it refers to the current Dalai Lama XIV, named Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho. He is also known as Tenzin Gyatso. There are previous Dalai Lama's, a title designating a religious leadership position.

[174] Robert Aho, *The Frog: A Spiritual Autobiography*, Spanning Many Lifetimes (Independently published, 2021), 2.

[175] Robert Aho, "Sacred Bardo Promise." *Timeless Luminosity Newsletter* (blog), September 22, 2022, https://www.timelessLuminosity.com/p/sacred-bardo-promise.

[176] NDErs receive notification their time is not finished because they have work and a mission still to do on Earth.

[177] Aho, "Sacred Bardo."

become your promise as well. We will be the same in the light of *Dharmakaya*. We will awaken if we never give up, no matter what."[178]

He teaches the practice of practicing Bodhicitta, the quality of a Bodhisattva, combining compassion and wisdom to cultivate the enlightenment mind.

Aho's OBE, NDE and Bardo experience, reminds me of Kastrup's whirlpool idea. Aho says,

> The experience of death is simple. We are always in transition, everything, every part of us, our bodies, our thoughts, this notion of self, every atom, our environment, all of it. We are energy but beyond that too. Inexplicable, ineffable, radiant. We are beyond all things. Our real nature defies explanation. It is as if we are composed of billions of little swirling eddies of bright light, tiny whirlpools of rainbows and song, casting beams of light into the cosmos, vibrations within a spacious field of timeless brilliance."[179] He says that "we are always changing, always new, we cannot be located in this process of flux and change. Our ignorance of what is timelessly luminous keeps us from our real condition. The whole universe is in the same way changing, transitioning, spinning, vibrating, always moving, recombing, never the same from one instant to another.[180] This, in my opinion, seems consistent with ideas from also in Quantum Physics. Aho dies in a heart procedure when he flatlined. He remembered being out of body and was aware of the operating theater and both sides of the Veil as he hovered on the borderlands. His experience is quoted below:

> I died. In a heart procedure. "I flatlined for a few minutes, and I turned to light during that experience. I was in that state for an eternity. I didn't go into the light, I became the light. The light and I were completely the same, not different in the least, completely at rest…. I was completely integrated into the most amazing, brilliant white light imaginable…. It was timeless, it was beyond all spatial constraints, beyond the universe, it was being consciously aware and ultimately compassionate, it was beyond any thought, object or concept. There was no me at this point. Then I returned to this person I had

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[178] Aho, "Sacred Bardo." Also see Substack. "Robert Aho | Substack," n.d., https://substack.com/@timelessLuminosity (accessed October 26, 2024).

[179] Aho, *Timeless Luminosity*, 1.

[180] Aho, *Timeless Luminosity*, 1-2

been. It was very simple. I remembered what had happened, and my life has become opened to that in every way.[181]

He adds that many people who have NDEs undergo a crisis when they realize this life is a magical illusion, despite seeming so real. The experience is more real than what we think reality is. It is indescribable. It is the experience of omniscient awareness, of eternity, of all that is and all that is beyond. Death brings us to who we really are, timeless Luminosity which is home. Our true nature is timeless Luminosity. I think it is as if we have all died before and been reincarnated then we have all had experience of death and its memory etched into our subconscious. Dzogchen is about direct experience with the ineffable nature of the mind. He had a strong NDE because he had prepared for death. In 2021 he has a second NDE, but he writes less about that experience. He lives a solitary meditative life in rural Minnesota, where he sometimes speaks to groups, teaching them that light is what we experience when we die, that light always pervades despite darkness in our lives and that this one Light brings us all together. [182] He also appears on social media talking about this Delog experience.[183] His NDE is both very Buddhist and yet very Western and modern, containing classic ubiquitous elements.

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[181] Aho, *Timeless Luminosity*, 2. Magic Is Real, "Robert Aho's NDE Validated His Attraction to Buddhism When He Saw His Past Lives," March 5, 2023, Magic Is Real, "Robert Aho's NDE Validated His Attraction to Buddhism When He Saw His Past Lives," March 5, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sG_0dJ8u-3c.

[182] On June 23, 2024, Aho spoke to Lake Superior Interfaith Community Church in Duluth Minnesota. Lake Superior Interfaith Community Church, "LSICC Sunday Service 6/23/2024," June 26, 2024,https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8dRDK0ljtKU.

[183] Other resources for Robert Aho see Love Covered Life Podcast, "Buddhist Dies and Spends an Eternity in the Light, Then Comes Back to Share This Message," July 13, 2022,https://youtu.be/V9V1H_iKbj0?si=IE0Bj88GFZufTLWo ; Love Covered Life Podcast, "Should You Go to the Light When You Die? | Robert Aho Near Death Experience Part 2," July 14, 2022, https://youtu.be/BC3wcptQGFs?si=EQOPEQzAW_0sd2rW ; **"**Magic is Real. Robert Aho's NDE Validated his Attraction to Buddhism when he Saw his Past Lives," March 5, 2023, https://youtu.be/sG_0dJ8u-3c?si=oLuKNIJLG_tmOYlX.

Jotipālo Bhikkhu is another a Westerner NDEr who received ordination as a Theravada Buddhist monk in the year 2000 and trained at Abhayagiri monastery, in California after his experience.[184] Whilst not a monk in the Tibetan tradition, he had an NDE in the Nepali Himalayas in 1992. He has released some social media videos recounting his experience. He was climbing Everest and got separated - for High Altitude pulmonary edema sickness – close to death - got to a small resthouse on the trail and laid down - he could see the molecules of air and psychedelic colors. Tiny little supernatural entities came to him and started to do healing work on him. Then he saw a coffin. Then he saw a Naga snake. He hears beautiful chanting and sees a tiny creature singing and dancing in the flame of the kerosene lamp. He sees an elephant and a monkey on him, and later he identifies these with Hindu gods Ganesh and Hanuman. He wished for death to escape the pain. A voice asked him if he wanted to die. He told the voice no he was not ready to die but needed to be outside the pain. He came out of his body and floated to the ceiling. He had a sense of self, eyesight, thought, but a sense of weight, fever and pain went away. He knew he was out of his body and felt afraid, so he reentered his body. He then got on a plane back to Katmandu which is much lower. He knows there is consciousness outside of and independent of the body. It was an awakening moment for him. When the physical body dies life continues, and what we do in this life has consequences. He chose the monastic life as a result.[185]

These Delog visions seem to be similar to generic NDEs. All of these experiences contain the mystical and the mysterious and describe another realm. There are cultural differences when

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[184] Abhayagiri is a Theravadin Buddhist monastery of the Thai Forest Tradition in Redwood Valley, California, in the tradition of Ajahn Chah.

[185] Ajahn Jotipālo has a YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/@Jotipalo ; Sauntering into Silence - Ajahn Jotipālo, "Monk Tells About Near Death Experience," November 25, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AAy9vyrkIBg ; Sauntering into Silence - Ajahn Jotipālo, "Near Death Experience - How It Unfolded (Part 2 of 3)," December 18, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-HYYlrwmCH0 ; Sauntering into Silence - Ajahn Jotipālo, "Near Death Experience - Relationships Can Be Complex (Part 3 of 3)," December 30, 2020, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NRLuqvOiZPY.

Western and Eastern NDEs are compared, but there are also similarities. However, all experiencers agree that consciousness and awareness continue outside of the physical body.

Implications of Tibetan Ideas and Experiences

There are many Delogs that remain in oral tradition and who are not written about, even though some texts go back to the 15th century in this literary Delog genre.[186] Western knowledge is limited to the most famous examples, as documented by Bryan Cuevas.[187] As with NDEs, Delogs are ordinary people and their stories are aimed at ordinary people, which contrasts with religious specialists and orthodox texts. While Delogs are part of lay culture, their lived tradition is set in its local context, and they carry otherworldly messages from the deceased to living related local villagers. Local issues related to certain areas incorporated in the narratives. Cuevas mentions that the narratives follow a standard plot, but that they are not embellished like hagiographies. NDEs follow a standard plot. I do not believe the plot comes first, rather the reason for a standard framework might lie in the veracity of similar spiritual experiences. It is possible that with Delogs and NDErs similar elements are encountered.[188]

Delogs tend to have more negative and hellish experiencers than NDErs as they visit Hell realms, meet scary entities such as Yama Shinje, but this god does send them back with a remedy to reform and void suffering in the afterlife. Cuevas does not explore the metaphysical aspects of their experiences, and although he does wonder aloud if the Delogs did actually die or not, he concludes that the social function and religious message of the narratives are more important. He

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[186] Bryan J. Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld: Buddhist Popular Narratives of Death and the Afterlife in Tibet* (Oxford University Press, 2008), 4.

[187] Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld*. Charles Bell met a delog woman behind the Potala in Lhasa Tibet in 1928. Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld,* 1.

[188] For the plot see Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld,* 14.

says he is not naïve enough to take the narratives as a reality that really happened to the Delogs and seeks a metaphorical meaning.[189] I am inclined to take Delog stories and NDEs more at face value, just as Tibetans and ordinary Westerners do. Just because the stories do not fit into our paradigms nowadays is not argument to reject them, just because we cannot fit it into our modern worldview. Afterall the stories of Troy were considered a made-up myth until the ruins of the city were discovered in 1871.

Whilst not strictly Tibetan, there are instances of Chinese NDEs, which occur in a culture heavily influenced by Mahayana ideas. According to an academic field study, forty percent of eight-one survivors of the Tangshan Earthquake in 1976 reported an NDE which qualified according to the Greyson scale.[190] An altered state of consciousness and forty classic NDE phenomenological elements were reported, which included cognitive, affective, paranormal and transcendental components such as seeing spirits in an unearthly realm and a point of no return.[191] The report states:

> Our subjects reported NDE phenomenological items not mentioned, or rarely mentioned, in NDEs reported from other countries: sensations of the world being exterminated or ceasing to exist, a sense of weightlessness, a feeling of being pulled or squeezed, ambivalence about death, a feeling of being a different person or a different kind of person, and unusual scents. The predominant phenomenological features in our series were feeling estranged from the body as if it belonged to someone else, unusually vivid thoughts, loss of emotions, unusual bodily sensations, life seeming like a dream, a feeling of dying, a feeling of peace or euphoria, a life review or "panoramic memory," and thinking unusually fast.[192]

This modern Chinese report illustrates how the same themes repeat again and again all over the world and in different eras.

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[189] Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld,* 14.

[190] Feng Zhi-ying, and Liu Jian-xun. "Near-Death Experiences Among Survivors of the 1976 Tangshan Earthquake." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 1 (1992): 39-48.

[191] Zhi-ying, Near-Death Experiences Among Survivors, 44-45.

[192] Zhi-ying, Near-Death Experiences Among Survivors, 46.

Cuevas cautions against comparative analysis of Tibetan and non-Tibetan traditions, unless the scholarship acknowledges that comparisons are rooted in different contexts.[193] This is a correct approach, nevertheless I do argue that there are physiological, emotional, and experiential universals across humankind, and a balance between the specific and the common can be part of comparative work. For example, all humans dream but the contents and inner language of their dreams might be different based on cultures, languages, and geographical aspects. This is why I stress that it is the elements that are less culturally significant, such as an OBE and continued awareness that are more universal and significant than culturally based specifics sch as seeing Yama or Jesus.

One example of cross-cultural studies is a unique Delog and NDE study by Lee W. Bailey who argues that Delogs are a bridge between NDEs and Tibetan shamanic practices.[194] H discusses the work of Pommaret and her interviews with living modern Delogs in Tibet such as Rizing Gyelmo, who had 'died for a few hours' rather than the days long 'deaths' of historical Delogs, and Karma Wangzom, who after her experiences 'dies' or goes into trance' certain feast days. [195] This raises an important point says Lee, what does death mean in these cultures? The word for death in Tibetan is '*shi ba'* which has two aspects (i) clinical death and (i) an OBE when consciousness leaves the body and travels, which Lee calls a "little death." [196]

So Delogs might just be astral travelling. I think, prior to modern medicine, the longer cases of unconsciousness might have been a deep coma. Nevertheless, I would argue that actual

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[193] Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld,* 15.

[194] Lee W. Bailey, "A "Little Death": the Near-Death Experience and Tibetan Delogs." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 19 (2001): 139-159. P.143 He says that the descent to the underworld is one of the most universal themes, and this obviously has a shamanic undertone. Shamanic episodes also involve a death and return to life aspect.

[195] Pommaret, *Revenants de l'au-Delà.*

[196] Bailey, Little Death, 153-4.

clinical death is not a requirement for an NDE type experience, only a deep shock or coming close with severe illness is enough to trigger such an experience. Lee also asks if the Delogs are fiction or history, and concludes, with Pommaret that they are genuine and are believed to have actually happened to real persons.[197] He also finds elements of both types of experience, Delog and NDE, sharing similar elements.[198] Lee concludes that "The NDE phenomenon, *Delog* visions, and shamanic journeys are spontaneous expansions far beyond our normal consciousness…(and) often present themselves as revelations of a divine oneness in the universe that holds life and death in its amazing embrace.[199]

Michael Nahm also sees similarities between NDEs, Tibetan accounts of Delogs and the Tibetan Book of the Dead. He also references the medieval *ars moriendi* traditions. He lists similarities such as OBEs, having a subtle body, entering an intersubjective afterlife realms, experiencing a life review or judgment.[200] I agree with him that cultural context matters but that these elements are cross cultural and he suggests that all people will find themselves in such a realm with these fundamental elements and that preparation before death is essential to prevent bewilderment.[201] This leads me to ponder that perhaps it is better to put less focus on features or elements and more on the capabilities of the entity such as abilities to travel outside time and space and continued consciousness, and the presence of interactive visions, regardless of the character or presentation of these in cultural terms.

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[197] Bailey, Little Death, 152.
[198] Bailey, Little Death, 155.
[199] Bailey, Little Death, 157.
[200] Michael Nahm, "The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Its history and controversial aspects of its contents." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 29, no. 3 (2011): 373-398.
[201] Bailey, Little Death, 394.

Alternative Ways to Reach the Bardo or Invisible Realms

It has been reported in general conversation in the Tibetan community that the reason knowledge of the Otherworlds and Bardos has been gained is through inner journeying and meditation. There is a link between going inside one's mind as a psychonaut to reach an altered state of consciousness when alternate planes of reality become clear and visible to the mind. Some Western NDErs who practice meditation have also experienced the realm of their NDE and been able to revisit it. You can recreate the NDE by meditating by quieting the mind, This takes a few years of practice, but you can learn to astral project and go out of body and explore the same realm as your NDE. This is experienced as going home and bathing in the infinite white light of love, peace and joy. There is no more fear, no time and no old sick body. Rod Chelberg M.D. [202] here describes how he would meditate for about a half hour and ask Heavenly Father to reveal himself. God reaches out and pulls you into his heat as long as your mind is open.[203] Folklore about *siddhi* powers such as clairvoyance, seeing the future and healing the sick, as well as levitation are shared in Tantric circles that encompass Hinduism and Tibetan Buddhism. These paranormal yogic qualities are accepted and form part of the belief system of ordinary people.

As mentioned previously in the section on psychedelics, the Greeks used mind altering plants to open their psyche up to the 'Otherworld' and *soma* inspired the Vedic seers. In India magic mushrooms that grow on cow dung patties were consumed and known to produce spiritual visions. Shiva the creator and destroyer is known to consume cannabis. Left hand tantra, which

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[202] Rod Chelberg, "My Near Death Experience Story as a Doctor — Spiritual Guide Rod Chelberg," n.d., https://www.drrodchelberg.com/my-journey (accessed March 14, 2023). Now retired, he offers death doula services. Chelberg has his own website here: https://www.drrodchelberg.com/media.

[203] NDE Compilations, "NDE Experiencers Discuss the Importance of Meditation," December 29, 2023, https://youtu.be/VQ0yDdUtdzM?si=aJcz4F3NLVn0PF6U.

encouraged that adherents partake of the forbidden 5 M's, found ways to achieve these altered states of consciousness using breathwork, fasting and concentration without the need for drugs. Ram Dass, as mentioned, also took the non-psychedelic path. A few years ago, I was honored to have lunch with H. H. Rigzin Dorjee Rinpoche, founder of the Nyingma Institute in Menlo Park, California. He did not elaborate but told me he had learned through meditation how to enter a meditative state and in some secret and mystical process, bargain to prevent the death of sick persons, even those with cancer. I am not sure exactly the extent of his *siddhi* healing powers but it does fall into the realm of the paranormal.

Contemporary Bardo Teachings in the West

Drikung Kagyu is a sub lineage of the Kagyu school that traces back to Tilopa. [204] In the United States the Garchen Institute is one of the fifty Dharma centers in this lineage, led by Garchen Rinpoche.[205] Others include Gar Drolma, Rinchen Choling.[206] In another lineage Orgen Dorje Den which was founded by the late Gyatrul Rinpoche from the Nyingma tradition, Palyul lineage, in the San Francisco Bay area.[207] It offers a weekly streamed zoom where Lasa Les Collins teaches from Padmasambhava's book Natural Liberation Meditation: based on the

[204] Recommended Drikung links for reference: https://www.drikung.org./ In the USA, https://www.drikung.org/north-america/.

[205]The Garchen Institute website: https://garchen.net/.

206 Website for Richen Choling: http://www.rinchencholing.org/?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0CMTAAAR2IM11moxRcRzJEF8g8Ed4vaKyRScpZQrNcc13_x2f3fvsN3UiFIkwFjoQ_aem_AYb0HQaDaIx-ZZ0n113EfiZNHTUGEfR9CcW1JGUxY0xnrLh4dK1N3WzXqfXABBk_IqtE8HcKfjcjG1uZ8rv-SmDv.

[207] Website for Orgyen Dorje Den Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Center, https://www.orgyendorjeden.org/orgyen-dorje-den-lamas/.

six Bardos, which he translated with Alan Wallace.208 It is linked to the Tashi Choling Center for Buddhist Studies in Ashland Oregon, also founded in 1980 by Gyatrul Rinpoche (1924-2023), who was a student of the great Nyingma leader Dudjom Jigdrel Yeshe Rinpoche (1904-1987).209 It conducts a ceremony, for those introduced into the secret mantra, called the Neydren Ritual for Guiding The Consciousnesses of the Deceased.210 It also offers The Six Bardos Retreat, focusing on navigating the afterlife, and led by Lama Collins. Dudjom Rinpoche gave teachings in the Bardos in 1980 in California as part of bringing the Dharma to the West.[211] He gave detailed descriptions of each of the six Bardos.

Gar Drolma, Ohio is another Kagyu community center which provides free online zoom teachings. I have received teachings from both Garchen Rinpoche and from the associated Gar Drolma Center, from Khenpo Samdup Rinpoche. Like all religions social media and internet connectivity have greatly contributed to the spread of ideas, and in this case, Dharma. Most members attend rituals, services, and teachings remotely. Samdup Rinpoche has led multiple teachings on the Bardos and on the *Bardo Thödol* itself and the website records the teachings in

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[208] Sambhava, Padma. *Natural Liberation: Padmasambhava's Teachings on the Six Bardos* (Simon and Schuster, 1998). "Events for November 2024 – Orgyen Dorje Den Tibetan Buddhist Meditation Center," October 25, 2024, https://www.orgyendorjeden.org/calendar/live-streamed-natural-liberation-meditation-based-on-the-six-bardos-w-lama-les-collins-21/. Natural Liberation Video - VimalaVideoTube, "Natural Liberation," June 28, 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wFG6gOXhEFE.

[209] Recommended links for other Tibetan organizations: https://www.tashicholing.org/index.html. https://www.tashicholing.org/programs.html. https://dudjominternational.org/?page_id=268. https://www.rigpawiki.org/index.php?title=Dudjom_Rinpoche.

[210] There is a link here for the text of the Neydren ritual and for the Six Bardos Retreat. It begins: "The guiding and liberating ceremony is carried out by practitioners who have understanding and skill in the methods of Secret Mantra. This practice is always performed in conjunction with the sadhana of the wisdom deity. It is in that state of pure awareness that the possibility of guiding the consciousness that is lost in the bardo (the intermediate state between lives) can occur. Contact is made with the disembodied consciousness by writing the seed syllables that correspond to the six realms of existence and also by making replicas and effigies of certain individuals. Through the power and blessing of prayer, compassion, method, and wisdom, the consciousness may be contacted and led from states of bewilderment and fear to higher, more productive, positive, and spiritual states of rebirth as well as the possibility of awakening in the pure realms of wisdom awareness."

[211] Cigay, "Teachings on Bardo by His Holiness Dudjom Rinpoche," February 24, 2019, https://cigay.blogspot.com/2019/02/teachings-on-bardo-by-his-holiness.html.

video form which can be accessed by the links.[212] The *White Sur* ritual consists of a smoke offering of flour, sweets, dairy products, or a special blend of offering substances. This practice can be dedicated for the benefit of people or animals who have died to help them purify karma and take a better rebirth. In the Drikung *Phowa* tradition, there is a sadhana called *Jag-Tsug-Ma* or *The Standing Blade of Grass* - a stalk of dry kusha grass is pushed into the top of the head.[213] Gar Drolma has its own version.[214] It is connected to the idea that an accomplished practioner of *Phowa* will have created a small hole at the top of the cranium through which consciousness can come out of after death.

In 2022-3 Venerable Robina Courtin from the F.P.M.T. tradition of Lama Tsongkhapa, Lama Yeshe and Lama Zopa, taught a series lessons on after death and dying via The Langsam Tibetan Meditation Center in Switzerland.[215] Accompanying texts were based on her book *How to Face Death without Fear*. 2020. [216] I asked her in session three if a Western NDE was a journey by the subtle mind. In her direct and concise manner, she replied "I don't know! It is just a journey…what happened is that the death process started but it didn't finish. They came back to life, it didn't finish, that's a simple way to put it. There's nothing cosmic about it."[217] Another

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[212] Recommended link to teaching videos: https://gardrolma.org/great-liberation-by-hearing-bardo-teachings-text-and-video/ https://gardrolma.org/the-great-liberation-by-hearing-in-the-intermediate-states/.

[213] shiva2012free, "Practice of Phowa in Tibet," May 5, 2012, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9pvcZE_141E, https://youtu.be/9pvcZE_141E?si=P8T15fGGaPwW3Bbq.

[214] Link to Gar Drolma's Blade of Grass Ceremony: https://gardrolma.org/programs/Buddha-amitabha-practice-great-drikung-phowa-chenmo-practice-the-standing-blade-of-grass/.

[215] Lhagsam Tibetan Meditation, "Death & Dying (Session1 12.01.2023) With Ven. Robina," January 16, 2023, https://youtu.be/FLv21SAiFO8?si=xBBwmbwF4Pkc8bhX. Lhagsam Tibetan Meditation, "Discovering Buddhism: Death and Rebirth (Session3 20.01.2022)," January 21, 2022, https://youtu.be/Ju4wLzTUP04?si=roMV86NPEPxUkHpP. Lhagsam Tibetan Meditation, "Death & Dying (Session4 02.02.2023) With Ven. Robina," March 25, 2023, https://youtu.be/r6Iv9xEGKvo?si=cgjMBc-9B7f9s4dB.

[216] Thubten Zopa, and Robina Courtin. *How to Face Death without Fear*. Revised edition (Wisdom Publications, 2020). Thubten Zopa and Robina Courtin. How To Face Death Without Fear: A Handbook (Wisdom Publications, 2020).

[217] Lhagsam Tibetan Meditation, "Death & Dying (Session3 26.01.2023) With Ven. Robina," January 31, 2023, https://youtu.be/uz2PoYsRyV0?si=9gAzXH4bn41ytIAT.

teacher I know personally and greatly respect is *ngakma*, Dr. Lourdes Arguelles, aka Lopon Dorje Khandro who is linked to Drikung Kyobpa Choling in Escondido California.[218] I listen to her teachings on death via zoom meetings. She repeats many of the Bardo teachings and main themes surrounding dying.

Descriptions of the Buddha Fields and Pure Lands [219]

The Pure Land of Amitabha is a world of mental images in which all projected desires are fulfilled.[220] Perhaps all humans all over the world can co-create their mind dependent worlds, which might seem as physical as the Earth, their own versions of paradise or Pure Lands? Badham thinks that this is a possibility and that one's karma affects the quality of the vision and projection. Evans-Wentz's translation and commentaries in his *Bardo Thödol* argue that one sees what one expects to see. Badham comments that: "What is essential to the *Bardo Thödol* is the idea that the mental images perceived in the Bardo state give expression to, and in so doing express judgement on, the conscious and unconscious desires and longings which have become characteristic of each individual person." [221] Bryan Cuevas notes that Delogs often teach that devotion to Avalokitesvara and the recitation of his scared mantra, *Om Mani Padme Hum*, can instantly lead to rebirth in his Pure Land.[222] It is beyond the scope of this dissertation to discuss the full gamut of Pure Land studies. In Tibet Pure Land beliefs are integrated into the schools rather than being a separate school in itself. Scholars such as Charles Brewer Jones and Georgios

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[218] "Lopon Dorje Khandro — Drikung Kyobpa Choling," Drikung Kyobpa Choling, n.d., https://www.drikungkc.org/lopon-dorje-khandro (accessed November 21, 2024).

[219] These ideas evolved from Indian Buddhism. In Vajrayana Pure Land ideas are integrated and do not form a separate school as in East Asian Mahayana Buddhism

[220] Paul Badham, *Near-Death Experiences, Beliefs about Life after Death, and the Tibetan Book of the Dead.* (International Buddhist Study Center at Tokyo Honganji, 1990), 16.

[221] Badham, *Near-Death Experiences,* 17.

[222] Cuevas, *Travels in the Netherworld*.

Halkias are experts in the area. Jones describes Tibetan Buddha Lands as "an immersive training ground to practice and prepare for Buddhahood" with these beliefs in a blissful land "inherited from Indian Buddhism, which developed into practices related to Amitabha and his land Sukhavati."[223] Georgios Halkias's quintessential work on Pure Land Literature in Tibet is famous and important as he traces the roots of these ideas back millennia. Salvation from rebirth in the Buddha Fields (Skt.*Buddha-kṣetra*) such as Sukhavati can be reached via prayer, and practices such as *phowa*.[224] He talks about how the Buddhas occupying "overlapping spaces of meaning" that " are generated along successive instances of territorialization of "sacred time and space," as in the case of deities acquiring transhistorical, social, and institutional consistency beyond their scriptural identities and regional worship."[225]

Halkias also has a second book focusing on Padmasambhava's Buddha Field Zangdok Palri, and the Glorious Copper Colored Mountain.[226] He describes the esoteric Buddha Field (Buddhakshetra) and its Lotus Light Palace which has been described by Jigme Lingpa and other masters.[227] A dakini murmurs to Dudjom Lingpa (1835-1903) who had his own vision of this Buddha Field at the end of his journey:

> Kye Ho, The Son of good family
> There are no goings and comings.
> These appearances are the false drawings of dreams.
> All are reflections of your own perception.
> If you focus your mind in the ultimate sphere,

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[223] Charles Brewer Jones, *Pure Land : History, Tradition, and Practice* (Shambhala, 2021), 36, 170.

[224] Georgios Halkias, *Luminous Bliss : A Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet : With an Annotated English Translation and Critical Analysis of the Orgyan-Gling Gold Manuscript of the Short SukhāVatīVyūha-SūTra* (University of Hawai'i Press, 2013), xxv.

[225] Halkias, *Luminous Bliss,* 192.

[226] Halkias also has a second book focusing on Padmasambhava's Buddha field Zangdok Palri, and the Glorious Copper Colored Mountain. Georgios Halkias, *The Copper-Colored Mountain: Jigme Lingpa on Rebirth in Padmasambhava's Pure Land* (Snow Lion, 2022), 38.

[227] Halkias, *The Copper-Colored Mountain,* 40.

You will wake up in the state of the ultimate sphere. [228]

Halkias concludes that "the Pure Land is as much a literal place as it is a mystical state. It is both a vision of truth and a compassionate creation."[229]

Phowa Another body of Tibetan literature and teachings relates to *phowa* or the techniques of actively dying in control of the winds and the energies that inhabit the channels *(rtsa)* of the body. These ideas are intricately linked to Tibetan physiology.

Analysis, Implications, Modern Studies and Debate

How do Tibetans know about the Bardos? Cuevas explains how ideas about the Bardos have developed in a tantric context, as well as *phowa* practices. He explains that meditation and tantric practices have been developed to allow the practitioner to access other realms of reality and to have direct experience of altered states of consciousness. Tantrikas have learned what from the outside seem to be magical techniques or siddhis, and from there knowledge of other realities is gained and then shared in tantric literatures.[230] Cuevas explains how *siddha* Bardo teachings can be traced to Tilopa and Naropa.[231] These traditions continue especially in Kagyu and Nyingma traditions. Deity Yoga *(lha-yi rnal- 'byor)* is still taught and practiced today. Dzogchen Ponlop emphasizes in his writings, how practical meditation, dreaming, and visualization techniques prepare the practitioner for death and the Bardos. e.g., training in

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[228] Halkias, *The Copper-Colored Mountain,*124. Also, -- Supawan Pui Lamsam, Kesang Choden Tashi Wangchuk, and Thondup. *Zangdok Palri : The Lotus Light Palace of Guru Rinpoche*. 1st ed. (Gatshel Publishing, 2012), 62.

[229] Halkias, *The Copper-Colored Mountain,*125.

[230] Cuevas, *Hidden History*, 45 See also Rama, Swami, *Living with the Himalayan Masters*. Lanham: Himalayan Institute, 2010.

[231] Cuevas, *Hidden History*, 47. e.g. Tilopa' s particular understanding of bardo is known from his brief *Instructional Advice on the Six Doctrines*.

Luminosity Yoga. [232] This form of knowledge is passed down in a strict lineage tradition from Lama and guru to student and is gained from the revelations and insights gained from the practices themselves. Such practices launch the student into an altered state of consciousness where they can access another and non-ordinary level of reality. He states, "These practices (Dream Yoga and *phowa*) are relevant, even crucial… until we transcend the journey itself. Who we are and where we are is Mind. Mind endures because it is unborn and unceasing. It endures because it transcends our concepts of time and space….It is 'mind' that journeys as a guest in this physical body until we take full possession of the boundless wisdom and compassion that are innate to us and realize the freedom and purity of our abiding nature," and referring to the spiritual journey we all undertake he adds, ""It is up to us how we work with our journey through the Bardos."[233]

Modern East-West Cross-Cultural Dialogues

For nearly two hundred years Westerners have entered into debate with Indian and Tibetans about religion and philosophy, which has led to a flowering and sharing of beliefs and ideas, which have evolved and enriched both cultures. The Dalai Lama XIV has frequently attended conferences to discuss topics of human importance. There is a symbiotic relationship, and Tibetans have become savvy to the wants and needs to Westerners, and their preference for 'rational' rather than 'superstitious' presentations of Buddhism. So, one can find Lamas who appear very humanistic and rational and who appeal to those who prefer to think of Buddhism as not having a god, and then there are those that still practice *siddhi* powers and 'supernatural'

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[232] Dzogchen Ponlop. *Mind Beyond Death* (Snow Lion Publications, 2006).
[233] Ponlop, *Mind Beyond Death*, 234-5.

healings…as I myself witnessed at the Garchen Institute in 2016. Many Westerners simplistically stereotype Buddhism and are unaware of its many forms and complexities of different versions. I have often heard that Nirvana is a blowing out, a nothingness… or that no-self means then end of life, as secular atheists believe. This could not be further from the truth, especially in Tibetan forms of Buddhism. These attitudes come from a shallow understanding of the nature of the apparent self, the continuation of the mindstream awareness, and the essential sameness of the Buddha Nature that belongs to all of us…. although there is no us, only the *Dharmakaya*. Ultimately if consciousness is ultimate, and is a quality of the Buddha, of all of us, whether in or not in the illusion of bodily form, the uniting principle is always conscious awareness, before and after the mirage of death.

Since 1992 the Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso (Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, né Lhamo Thondup 1935-) has held the Mind and Life Conferences to which many world experts and scientists, such as neurologists have been invited. [234] These are particularly important discussions, and I want to spend time discussing them for that reason. They unite spirituality and science in a conversation. Here in these conferences and dialogues which continue even now, westerners present psychoanalysis and ideas about the subconscious while the Dalai Lama shares Tibetan ideas of Dream Yoga, and alternative levels of consciousness. The book *Sleeping Dreaming Dying* (1997) resulted from the discussions of the fourth Mind and Life Conference in 1992 in Dharamsala, India.[235]

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[234] Mind and Life Institute, "Mind & Life Dialogues & Conversations - Mind &Amp; Life Institute." Mind & Life Institute, December 12, 2023, https://www.mindandlife.org/events/mind-and-life-dialogues/.

[235] "Sleeping, Dreaming and Dying," 1992 Mind & Life Dialogue IV, Mind & Life Institute, accessed 2/10/2024, https://www.mindandlife.org/event/1992-mind-and-life-dialogue-iv/. After 1992, these mind and life dialogues continued annually exploring different areas in the fields of mind, body, consciousness, neuroscience and emotions, psychology and the nature of matter.

What is clear is that Tibetan concepts of what the personal self is composed of and ideas about death and the afterlife are coming from a perspective quite alien to the Western model. In the discussion about near-death experiences and the Bardos key points were raised. In the discussions similarities between NDEs and the *Bardo Thödol*'s Bardo Being experiences were discussed. In both types of experiences lights, sounds, noises and flashing colored lights, entities and figures are reported. There is heightened awareness. [236] In both there is a journey, movement, and 'travel.' The differences seem to be culturally conditioned. Both encounter a bright light, which has often a connotation of being super consciousness, a sort of 'ground of all being.' In NDEs the light exudes warmth and love, and energy. This has been reported cross culturally and in various eras. His holiness mentioned that those that go to the clear light but no further.[237] The period from clinical death to seeing the clear light can be seconds or minutes, so this is feasible. However, while Buddhist practioner can remain in the Clear Light for a week, in these cases they could not ever be resuscitated.

In Tibetan Buddhism all people who die first see the Clear Light. His holiness said that the light in NDEs appears to be like the Clear Light.[238] I realized an important distinction here. The NDE journey happens in minutes of Earth time, but the Bardo journey happens over a forty-nine-day period. Even though time does not operate there in both traditions, from the Earthly perspective, NDRs only see the tip of the iceberg while Bardo Beings are fully immersed. Necessarily then differences are to be expected. Knowledge of the Bardos is not conveyed by returnees but from Lamas who can remember past lives and the Bardos in between.[239] These are

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[236] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 91.
[237] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 199.
[238] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 208.
[239] This relates to the process of choosing who is a reincarnated Lama, when a child is asked to recognize ritual implements.

a different sort of report than a personal NDE subjective testimony. His Holiness then mentions that Tibetan folklore has stories of ghosts, of those who are between the realms, and he admits that these are hard to reconcile with traditional doctrines of the six realms. He adds it is hard to say whether they are in the Bardo state or not.[240] He suggests that perhaps there are just different worlds, as in the Kalacakra system, and spirits are from one of these other worlds.[241] The topic of Delogs was raised as a possible return from the dead phenomenon. It was agreed that they might have been close to but not dead and that their dream body or even some form of subtle energy body travelled in other worlds, but that it was never severed from the gross body, because that is irreversible.[242] His Holiness added that only yogis and highly realized practitioners, who are very rare, can separate the subtle energy mind from the gross body in meditation and bring it back. Deep meditation can allow for control of the five inner elements and the five outer elements and then supernatural abilities to see through solid objects or walk though empty space.[243]

The topic of cultural specificity of visions was discussed. Halifax noted that mental energy is drawn to the object that it wants.[244] This is indeed what occurs both in the Bardo and in NDEs and it does seem to be cultural projections that are described. This related to the idea of the Sambhogakaya which fluidly appears in the form that the perceiver expects. This is because it appears for the sake of helping all sentient beings and therefore should not appear foreign. It is a "relational appearance," says Halifax.[245] Even Buddhists see different Buddhist entities depending on their school of thought. I tend to agree because in NDEs it seems that whatever

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[240] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 202-3.
[241] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 205.
[242] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 207.
[243] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 209.
[244] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 211.
[245] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 212.

appears is tailor made, not just because it is expected to see the heaven of one's religion, but because the entities on the other side choose to present themselves to the deceased in a particular fashion. (This all depends on whether one has a religious perspective or not). This is not to suggest that there are forms of the Sambhogakaya that is intrinsically autonomous from the perceiver, not is this comparable to a believer-deity encounter. The Bardo Being is the 'same' as the Buddha, with Buddha Nature, and it not dualistic, whereas in Abrahamic views, there is a separation between the divine and the human. Comparing the two systems, West and East are fraught with challenges. The dream theory of NDEs kept being emphasized by the Dalai Lama. This was where most common ground was reached.

How Do Tibetan Buddhists Regard NDEs?

The Dalai Lama appears skeptical about NDEs when Joan Halifax discussed them with him.[246] Halifax presented the history of NDE studies to the Dalai Lama, and how the *Bardo Thödol*, which came west in Evens-Wentz's version, has become incredibly famous and connected to the hospice and dying movements in the west. He mentioned universal human rites of passage especially those around death, arguing that the west has lost its rites of passage and have experienced alienation as a result. (I would add that Eastern spirituality fills this void, this vacuum of lost religion) She highlighted the intimacy and compassion of the Tibetan death practices in contrast with the Western repression and objectification of death. She adds that the Vietnam war and experimentation with psychedelics opened up a new way to deal with death and find new ways to cope.[247] Halifax presents the history of NDEs and describes key elements,

[246] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 10.
[247] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 177-78.

"prototypical sequences of events through which a person going through a near-death or clinical death experience can pass", and the story of Dr Ritchie to the Dalai Lama.[248] Referring to Ritchie the Dalai Lama said "The Dalai Lama was silent for a moment and then added, "It would be difficult to determine whether this person actually was out of the body, or whether the individual simply had a fantasy of being out of the body."[249] After she has added information about the work of Kenneth Ring, Michel Sabom and Raymond Moody, the Dalai Lama responded: "His Holiness continued, his usual skeptical self. "Have many of those who have had near-death experiences ever encountered the *Bardo Thödol*, so that they might have been influenced by what they've read?"[250] He also suggested repressed childhood memories from religion resurfacing, even if the adult was atheist. Halifax pushes back saying that "It does not seem at all like a dream or a hallucination. On the contrary, his mental state is one of clarity and alertness."[251] After listening to more descriptions of NDEs the Dalai Lama suggested a solution which Halifax describes: "At this point His Holiness offered the first challenge to the current interpretation of these observations as related to "true" death experiences.

> "I am wondering whether these experiences are more of a dream type, because one constant theme that keeps coming up is this experience of joyfully reuniting with the relatives. It is very rare that relatives who have already passed away will still be in that type of existence. They would have already taken rebirth in another realm of existence. There's just the barest possibility that those deceased relatives would still be in the state where they could contact people who were having their near-death experience. But it's almost an impossibility. I think that it's more likely that due to the manifestation of a person's own imprints, or latent propensities, these very images of loved ones come to mind, and one has the sense of receiving advice or encouragement from them. But it's purely a subjective phenomenon." [252]

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[248] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 182-184. – Dr. George G. Ritchie (1923-2007) experienced one of the most famous NDEs, and his book *Return from Tomorrow* (1978) inspired Raymond Moody.
[249] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 183.
[250] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 186.
[251] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 187.
[252] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 188-189.

I also had the idea that an NDE might be akin to a dream state. There are indeed similarities. However, dreams can be nonsensical and contain impossibilities, and they do not progress in the classic pattern of an NDE. Dreams do not appear to be solid, nor entry into a real existing otherworld, whereas the afterlife does seem to be more solid, like it is really there, filed with sentient souls. Also, Bardo stories mention other Bardo Beings including meeting relatives and friends. Now it is possible that these Bardo Beings are projections with no independent existence, but then why are Bodhisattvas and lamas who have died and entered the Bardo rescue and help the lost Bardo Beings? Then again, the Dalai Lama keeps stressing the dream idea and points out that people in an NDE are not technically dead, or not dead long enough to actually enter a Bardo realm.[253] This idea of the connection between dreams and NDEs is held by others, such as Lama Yeshe. [254]So, from his perspective the 'body' of an NDEr is different from the 'body' of a corpse. Their visions ought to be different. Perhaps the NDEr has a dream body?

It seems as if there are different levels and origins of Bardo doctrines, some from folk sources and others from Eastern academics. While it is true that the Tibetan description of a being in the Bardo is subjective, the focus is on the progress of one mindstream self, most NDEs are about relationship with others it he spiritual realms, and often relationship with a deity.

Out of this confusion it seems to me that there are similarities and differences between NDEs and Tibetan Bardo ideas, but it is premature and simplistic to compare the two and insist they are the same. There are similarities, such as the bodies of Bardo Beings and NDErs having no physical defects, having a continuation of awareness outside of the physical body, and having

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[253]Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*, 190.

[254] Thubten Yeshe, and Thubten Zopa, *Life, Death and after Death*. Edited by Nicholas Ribush (Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, 2011), 45.

OBE and psi capabilities, but also differences too great for them to be merged into a 'single world wisdom.' I do believe though that comparison makes us think more deeply about these mysteries, and we can come to a deeper understanding of both our own and others' beliefs.

The Dalai Lama has authored and written prefaces to many books related to the Tibetan view of death and dying, as well as neuroscience. [255] His book *Mind of Clear Light* provides an authoritative voice on the Bardos and afterlife.[256] He probes into the structure and meaning of the intermediate state, with a full explanation of the Clear Light. The book gives advice on how to die well. I once asked Garchen Rinpoche about how to die, in my own case, and he told me no secret teachings are necessary. He told me to fill by body with loving kindness and compassion and concentrate on that.[257] The Dalai Lama provides information about visions to be expected in the dying process as the body goes through elemental dissolution such as images, smoke, fireflies, various colors and their meaning and which accompany the bodily stages of Earth dissolving into water, water into fire, and fire into air.[258]

He also defines consciousness in this book:

> "Consciousness is defined as that which is luminous and knowing. It is luminous in the double sense that its nature is clear and that it illuminates, or reveals, like a lamp that dispels darkness so that objects may be seen. Consciousness also knows objects in the sense that it at least apprehends them, even when it does not know them properly. Consciousness is composed of moments, instead of cells, atoms, or particles."[259]

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[255] Dalai Lama and Patricia Smith Churchland, *Where Buddhism Meets Neuroscience: Conversations with the Dalai Lama on the Spiritual and Scientific Views of our Minds* (Shambhala, 2018). Dalai Lama, *The Universe in a Single Atom: The Convergence of Science and Spirituality* (Harmony, 2005).

[256] Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho (Dalai Lama), and Jeffrey Hopkins. *Mind of Clear Light: Advice on Living Well and Dying Consciously* (Atria Books, 2004).

[257] During a personal retreat at the Garchen Institute in Arizona, 2017.

[258] Dalai Lama, *Mind of Clear Light*, 120.

[259] Dalai Lama, *Mind of Clear Light*, 130.

He also remarks that different levels of practitioners, from skilled to unskilled undergo varied experiences and have different needs, for example a yogi can traverse the Bardo and choose the next life more easily. [260] The Dalai Lama is the authoritative Tibetan voice on matters of bringing science and Tibetan views of consciousness together in mutual respect. This is the intention of books such as *The Universe in a Single Atom*. (2005).[261] For an understanding of the Bardo states however it is his book *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying* which has the best teachings pertaining to afterlife states.[262] A previously mentioned he thinks NDEs might simply be caused by imprints and dreamlike states. He seems unable to definitely decide on the links between NDEs and the Bardo, but not all Buddhists are in agreement and many Buddhist experiencers such as our Delogs for example speak from their experiences and argue that there is a definite correlation. The Dalai Lama might perhaps not know too much about Near-Death Studies research. When told that NDErs have perfect bodies he states:

> In Tibetan Buddhist literature the body of a *Bardo* being is explained as being free of all defects, even if the person in the former life had physical deformities. There are two main positions concerning the exact nature of this physical form of a *Bardo* being. One says it is similar to the previous life, and the other says it is more like the body of the life to come. A third position says the body during the first half of the *Bardo* resembles one's previous body, and during the second half it resembles the body in the future life.[263]

So, there is room to build up a Tibetan Buddhist – Western debate comparing NDEs and Bardo states. In my research I discovered thousands upon thousands of NDEs and VTEs, but only a handful of Delog accounts. The reason in this discrepancy is not the variation of population, but I think it lies in the fact that Tibetans are more likely not to report what we might

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[260] Dalai Lama, *Mind of Clear Light* 185.
[261] Dalai Lama, *Universe in a Single Atom.*
[262] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying.*
[263] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying,* 190.

label as NDEs, because for them it is part of life and normalized, and an accepted part of tradition. Also sharing personal narratives of this sort to wide audiences beyond the local community and extended family would not come to mind. Tibetan culture is less inclined to stress the sharing of individual experiences, and more focused on the community and established traditional religious expressions. The Delogs are outsiders, and stray from these set behavioral norms.

One reason that comparing the NDE with the Bardo might be hard, is something the Dalai Lama also alludes to, is that NDErs so return to life, whereas Bardo Beings do not. Bardo Beings are actually dead and too far into the process to return. The Dalai Lama conceded that those who had seen the clear light at the beginning of the experience might be able to return but not those who go deeper.[264] That said, medical resuscitation sciences are modern and did not operate when these views were formulated in Tibet. This raises the question of the depth of penetration into the afterlife by those on the border of life and death. As I previously states, NDEs are the borderlands of the afterlife and NDErs only see what is presented to them and it might only be a sliver of the entirety of what the afterlife actually is. When monks visit Bardo realms in meditation, they are not severing their energy mind and the gross body but so little of these journeys are written in English that their experiences are hard for me to explore. It is also part of the secret level of Tantric practice and many of these teachings are not shared with the uninitiated. The recall of past lives however is shared and is common. The conclusion of this book is that in the Bardo state mental energy goes towards the object you concentrate on and thus in the Bardo cultural specificity of visions is to be expected.[265]

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[264] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying,* 199.
[265] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying,* 211–12.

Even Tibetans might see different patterns of visions depending on their lifetime preferences in practice and visualization Deity Yogas. So, what appears in NDEs is tailor made to match our expectations. Joan Halifax insists that underneath the cultural appearances of visions there is a fundamental structure on which these manifestations are based.[266] I would take Spira's idea of the cinema screen…. Bardo Beings are in the cinema, the movie is chosen by your cultural preference and the screen is the underlying consciousness of the *Dharmakaya*.

Another organization teaching about death and dying is the FPMT (The Foundation for the Preservation of the Mahayana Tradition).[267] Lama Yeshe spent his life teaching about the intermediate state and writing books to help people prepare for this experience, e.g., he gave lectures on how to achieve the transference of consciousness.[268] He stressed dying in a relaxed happy state of mind, without grasping, as the best chance for a good rebirth and for those who find *phowa* difficult he recommended instead asking Amitabha to take them to his Pure Land.[269] Lama Zopa Rinpoche, recently deceased, along with Lama Yeshe taught a generation of Western Buddhists and left a rich legacy of books and lectures on video.

Other Studies Comparing NDEs to Tibetan Buddhism

Noticing similarities and parallels between Tibetan and Western NDEs have been recognized in the West since the earlier half of the 20th century when the Tibetan Book of the Dead was translated, and especially in the United States in the 1960's when it was used on the

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[266] Dalai Lama XIV, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying,* 212.
[267] Recommended website of the FPMT: https://fpmt.org/.
[268] Thubten Yeshe, *Transference of Consciousness at the Time of Death* (Wisdom Publications, 1991).
[269] See Yeshe, *Transference of Consciousness*; Thubten Yeshe, "Powa: Transference of Consciousness at the Time of Death," March 1981, Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive #196, https://www.lamayeshe.com/article/powa-transference-consciousness-time-death.

West Coast by the *Harvard Three* and Grof to help with the dying. Lawrence Epstein wrote a chapter comparing Tibetan and Western near-death experiences.[270] Rather than use Tibetan texts as the source for Otherworldly experiences he used the Delog (*das-log*) experience from popular lived religion. He found that their experience was a shamanic transformative trance experience and dissociation producing and altered state of consciousness. [271]He argued that their NDE experience contributed to them achieving a spiritual maturity in the Buddhist sense. He argues they failed in other ways to gain social or religious standing and status. He thinks they had an identity crisis I their youth, failed to form intimate relationships and regressed into ego and fantasy I would caution against applying questionable Freudian and Western psychological approaches to experiences that happen in a Tibetan cultural context. He read their biographies and applied Eriksonian psychology to analyze their personality. As well as personality issues, the political struggles and stresses added to the context of their experience and influenced it, such as in periods when morality needed to be upheld. He contrasts NDEs and Delog experiences, DLEs arguing that sociocultural values underpin and actually produce the experiences. Epstein demonstrates his atheistic and naturalistic approach to this topic. He says NDEs and altered states of consciousness have much in common, claiming both are states of dissociation. [272] I feel the opposite, NDEs are nothing like dissociation but in fact the opposite…focus is intense, and one is highly aware and super conscious.

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[270] Lawrence Epstein, A Comparative View of Tibetan and Western Near-Death Experiences. In eds., Wylie, Turrell V., Lawrence Epstein, and Richard Sherburne. *Reflections on Tibetan Culture: Essays in Memory of Turrell V. Wylie.* (E. Mellen Press, 1990) 315-328.

[271] Bstan-'dzin chos-rgyal, Shākya'i dge-slong, Zla-ba-bsam-'grub, and Turrell V. Wylie. *A History of Bhutan : From the 7th Century A.D. To the 18th Century A.D.* Special limited ed. (Historical Reproductions, 1969).

[272] Dissociation can be daydreaming, losing touch with one's surroundings, feeling disconnected from the world such as being absorbed in a book, and the world seems unreal. I stressful or traumatic episodes the mind escapes to avoid pain by losing awareness. It might involve memory gaps.

He says NDEs are just stress responses and hence he expects, given shared human physiology, that the structure of NDEs is stable cross culturally, however it is not stable, and there are differences in content.[273] Epstein says that the subjects are usually those who have undergone life threatening medical or traumatic emergencies. Although I would say that this is not always the case. He compares Western NDEs using Moody (1975), Sabom (1982) and Ring's (1982) reports and compares them with Delog biographies.[274] Moody identifies Ineffability Hearing out news that they have died, Feelings of peace and quiet, noise, dark tunnel, OBE, meeting others, seeing and entering light, life review, border, coming back, telling others, effect on lives, new views of death, corroboration. Ring and Sabom present a similar scheme. Epstein cleverly takes their schemata and applies them to corresponding aspects of the Delog reports.[275] What strikes me is their similarity with generic NDE reports.

1. The Delog is ill and may be in pain

2. Most do not recognize that they have died. They may not recognize dissolution in the transitions of the Bardo which is supposed to be painful physically and psychically.

3. They encounter the preliminary light, secondary lights, colors and sometimes a dark tunnel structure. Depending on their knowledge, they might recognize these. There may be a partial life review focusing on the moral aspect of human life and there may be remorse.

4. They hear the noises of the chos-nyid Bardo such as dragon roaring, shouts of yamas or the disembodied voices of supernaturals

[273] Epstein, History and Psychology of the 'Das-log, 316.
[274] Epstein, History and Psychology of the 'Das-log, 316-317.
[275] He calls them DLEs as opposed to NDEs. The DL in DLE is for Delog and the E for experiences.

5. OBE – they are feeling negative emotions, linked to poor morality of the world such as anger, disappointment, and disillusionment with others. They might have the ability to travel instantaneously.

6. They are accompanied by a guide and may witness painful scenes and meet others known to them. They are given messages to take back.

7. They witness trials in hell, crimes and punishments are explained. Tortured souls send back messages to the living. The Dharmaraja (Dharma King) explains matters to the Delog and exhorts all to live a moral life and spreads this message. They are sent back.

8. They return to their body and feel fear and revulsion to the body.

9. The Delog has a renewed sense of purpose and commitment to work for the salvation of all beings. Delogs still fear death – and view life as an easily wasted opportunity for religious progress. The Delog will renounce family and personal relationships to pursue spiritual progress.[276]

Epstein says that the structure of the elements of Western and Tibetan experiences is similar, but they might occur in a different order. Both contain timelessness, ineffability, and a heightened sense of reality. However, he thinks the values differ a lot. In Western the stress is on peace comfort, lack of pain, euphoria but the Tibetan emphasizes remorse, pain, fear, disappointment, and disillusionment. This is a fair observation. I would say that numbers 1-9 do compare closely with Western NDEs, with a Tibetan cultural aspect e.g., Yama instead of the life review. He pertinently asks, “An emic Tibetan explanation might concur with the above suggestions but then why is the Western experience beatific and the Tibetan terrifying?” I would answer that part of the Tibetan cultural background, going back to Bon Indigenous and Shamanic

[276] Epstein, History and Psychology of the 'Das-log, 319-21.

beliefs, is a fear of the afterlife. These fears are clearly echoed in the experiences. Buddhism focuses Samsara the realm of suffering, how to overcome suffering, so whatever realm or Bardo one is in, suffering is likely present. Only a realized Lama or a Buddha, would be equipped to navigate these frightening experiences. In NDEs as with Delog, one tends to see what is expected. Epstein argues that argue that differences between NDEs and Delog experiences (DLEs) are culture bound.[277] He then criticizes Ring and Sabom for their universalistic claims that all NDEs worldwide have a similar core. He says "the ego which undergoes the NDE, narrates, interprets, and makes meaningful such a powerful experience as the NDE appears to be, is not merely an independent kernel wrapped in a husk of culture. Ego and its processes are cultural constructs as well."[278] He concedes that the neurophysiology of the NDE produces similar structural elements universally, but says culture explains the different values between Western and Eastern experiences. I think that Epstein makes valid arguments for the cultural influence on NDEs and Delog experiences, however I differ because I believe that merely revealing cultural influences and expectations does not wholly explain the origin and veracity of the phenomenon. Human senses and emotions such as feeling heat, crying in pain, joy, and fear are universal human traits There is a complex web of universal human traits based on sense perception and a shared tendency to gravitate to love and shun discomfort…. underneath the layer of culture. Tibetan and Buddhist values are that life is suffering and happiness is limited. Health, wealth, and love are impermanent.

At death family attachments are to be severed. Mormon values are different and focus on family attachments and a personal relationship with the divine. Family reunions are highlighted

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[277] Epstein, History and Psychology of the 'Das-log, 321.
[278] Epstein, History and Psychology of the 'Das-log, 321.

and encouraged. Western NDEs are generally blissful and beatific. This reflects different attitudes in different societies. Tibetans respect renunciation, and the image of the singular yogi isolated in a cave seeking enlightenment is a trope. Mormons seek salvation as a community, with human and human divine relationships and the fulfillment of obligations as the bedrock of liberation. Westerners often choose to return but Delogs are sent back to the Earthly realm. When it comes to the authenticity of these otherworldly experiences Epstein is agnostic. He would not posit that the Bardo 'exists' in empirical reality. Ring suggested that a 'parapsychological holographic explanation' where a state of consciousness functions independently of the brain in a new order of reality. (Ring 1982) Grosso (1982) and Osis & Haraldson (1977) suggest components of consciousness or an ontologically real afterlife survival of a soul. Perhaps the way we try to explain these anomalous experiences reveals our own cultural and religious backgrounds. Despite Epstein's agnosticism, his scholarship is a valuable contribution to the topic.

Paul Badham mentions that NDEs seem to have a mind-dependent experience in that relatives met are seen in the form they are remembered on Earth. However, it is not a mind created hallucination, because often people are seen who the NDEr does not know to be dead, and sometimes a relative is met, who the NDEr did not know existed. Their existence is confirmed upon return to the world and after subsequent inquiries.[279]

Raymond Lee's article brings together death, Dream Yoga, near-death experiences and Clear Light and he focuses on their shared links to disembodied consciousness. He argues, like the Dalai Lama, that the closest state of consciousness to an NDE is in the lucid dream state and that the consciousness of the NDEr is still tied to this world but is wandering temporarily in other

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[279] Badham, *Near-Death Experiences*, 8.

realms.[280] Lee says that the stilling of the physical body on sleep and during an NDE facilitates the consciousness to reach higher levels. And he draws a parallel to these states to shamanic journeying. [281] It makes sense to me to mention shamanic parallels to after death experiences, especially given the indigenous Bon and shamanic influences of Tibetan religions on Vajrayana. Lee refers to Mircea Eliade's work on shamanic psychic journeys into other realms.[282] Lee suggests that disembodied consciousness is an alternative source of reality formation.[283]

Consciousness' Involvement in the Co-Creation of Reality

This is a very pertinent observation and may indeed be what is occurring during these anomalous experiences. I would call it *consciousness' ability for the co-creation of reality*. Lee continues to explore Western psychological academic theories. In both lucid dreaming, psychedelic experiences and the Bardo and the NDE the conscious will can change the direction of the experience.[284] There is some control. Tibetans practice Dream Yoga so that when they die, they can navigate the Bardos. [285] They try to find the Clear Light on the borders of dreaming and waking.[286] Lee specifies the qualities of the Clear Light which is the essential root teaching of nondualism in Vajrayana:

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[280] Raymond LM. Lee, "The Reimagination of Death: Dream Yoga, Near-Death, and Clear Light." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* (2004). 221.

[281] Lee, Reimagination of Death, 222.

[282] Lee, Reimagination of Death, 22. -- Eliade, M. *Shamanism: Archaic techniques of ecstasy.* (Princeton University Press, 1964).

[283] Lee, Reimagination of Death, 223.

[284] Charles Tart, 'The Basic Nature of Altered States of Consciousness, A System Approach'." *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 1 (1976).

[285] Reginald A. Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World : The Tantric Buddhism of Tibet* (Shambhala, 2001), 200. The purpose of dream yoga is to practice tool to aid in bardo after death and to realize the illusory body.

[286] Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying,* 40, 44,129.

In Dream Yoga, non-dual awareness of the clear light implies that the practitioner does not perceive the light as being somewhere out there to be apprehended and recognized. Such awareness is internally self-contained, so no need arises to identify the light as something discrete and having a role or many roles to fulfill at that particular moment. Instead, an advanced practitioner would see no difference between his or her mind and the clear light once the recognition is made. The differentiation between the practitioner's consciousness and the clear light collapses when the practitioner's own realization no longer supports the subject-object distinction in meditation. Since there is no direct correspondence between the NDE and Dream Yoga, one might be inclined to argue that the light of the NDE might not be experientially similar to the clear light encountered by the practitioner of Dream Yoga. Yet the experience of light is central to both the NDE and Dream Yoga, this experience being the connecting link to the clear light that supposedly manifests at the time of death.[287]

Lee the points out that NDErs are unlikely to be Dream Yoga practitioners and as a result when they describe the Light it is given in a dualistic description. NDErs in other words lack the ability to see the Light in a non-dual way and they see it as something external to them. Only those who describe beings absorbed by the light merge into a nondual state with a loss of identity, but this is rarer in the typical NDE experience.[288] Lee's thesis is that the Tibetan Clear Light and the NDE light are the same, only experienced differently. I can appreciate that a Westerner who expects to meet Jesus or God, assumes that the light is divine. They are not conditioned to see the divine as aspects of themselves. To suggest to them that they are God is blasphemous. Hence, the difference, Lee suggests, is in the interpretation of the light and not in

[287] Lee, Reimagination of Death, 230.
[288] Lee, Reimagination of Death, 231.

the nature of the light itself. This also ties in with my intuition that self-created visionary projections stemming from expectations are as much a part of the experience than any external phenomena encountered. Lee argues that there is a continuum between mind and light.[289] Dream Yoga then is one of the preparatory exercises for the after-death state. I often experience lucid dreams and can direct my actions in them; however, it is said that navigating the after death Bardo is much harder than lucid dreaming.[290] Being aware of dreaming in the lucid dream relates to the importance of realizing one is 'dead', or abandoned the human body, in the death Bardo. So many beings so not realize they are dead and suffer confusion and terror in this realm as a result. Lama Lhanang advises that those who are prepared can experience the fullest experience of aliveness in the after death Bardo, if fear is banished and a proper understanding reached.[291]

Sogyal Rinpoche Sogyal Rinpoche [292] sees many similarities between NDEs and the *Sipai* Bardo of Becoming.[293]In his book *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* he has a whole section on NDEs.[294] Sogyal believes that the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, as it is received in the West is out of context and does not provide a comprehensive picture of death and rebirth, and he wrote this book to provide a background so that Westerners could understand death better. He teaches the reader that the Tibetan word for body is "*lü*" which means 'something one leaves behind' like baggage.[295] Sogyal's book is comprehensive, covering all aspects of the dying

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[289] Lee, Reimagination of Death, 232.

[290] Lama Lhanang, and Mordy Levine. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead for Beginners : A Guide to Living and Dying*. Boulder (Sounds True, 2023).

[291] Lama Lhanang, *Tibetan Book of the Dead for Beginners.*

[292] Sogyal, Rinpoche. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, 319-336.

[293] Sogyal, Rinpoche. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*.

[294] The Dalai Lama wrote the preface giving his book authority.

[295] Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, 20. Donald S. Lopez Jr, *Prisoners of Shangri-la: Tibetan Buddhism and the West* (University of Chicago Press, 2018), 78-79.

process and the beliefs and philosophies behind it, and he discusses the various stages, what is experienced, and explains *phowa*, the transference of consciousness.

He adds new information to the intermediate state which is not obvious in the *Bardo Thödol.* He describes something akin to a life review in an NDE: "In the Bardo of Becoming we relive all the experiences of our past life, reviewing minute details long lost to memory, and revisiting places,"[296] He also discusses how the deceased many be unaware they are dead and cannot communicate or get the attention of the living. We believe we exist but fail to realize that all these thoughts arise only from mind, thus our illusions mold the Bardo world we perceive.[297]

Sogyal takes nearly a hundred pages to compare NDEs and the Bardos, beginning with the story of the monk's heavenly visit in Bede's ancient Anglo-Saxon chronicle [298], and then continuing through a detailed description of the features of Western NDEs. Each NDE feature is linked to a corresponding excerpt from the *Bardo Thödol*. e.g., Sogyal says, "In the Bardo of Becoming, as well as many other kinds of visions, the mental body will see visions and signs of different realms. A small percentage of near-death survivors report visions of inner worlds, of paradises, cities of light, with transcendental music."[299] He also acknowledges difference, the main one being that NDErs do not actually die and remain dead. This explains obvious disparities, he says. [300] I agree, for what is seen on the borderlands of living and dying might be very different from going beyond the barrier or point of no return. Sogyal says that the common element lies in the transformative aftereffects of such an experience: "The central message that the near-death experiencers bring back from their encounter with death, or the presence or "being

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[296] Sogyal, Rinpoche. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, 289.
[297] Sogyal, Rinpoche. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, 290.
[298] Bede, and David Knowles. *Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation*. (London: J.M. Dent, 1910).
[299] Sogyal, Rinpoche. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, 327.
[300] Sogyal, Rinpoche. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, 332.

of light," is exactly the same as that of Buddha and of the Bardo teachings: that the essential and most important qualities in life are love and knowledge, compassion and wisdom."[301] It is significant that Sogyal, as a Tibetan, supports the NDE genre and is so passionate about defending this as a universal experience.

Andrew Holecek is currently a popular scholar-practitioner who teaches expensive courses on the *Bardo Thödol*. He has published books on Dream Yoga and dying.[302] He is active on social media and has his own website with a section on the Bardos.[303] It is meant to be a practical application to help all humans face their own death. He calls death the most precious experience in life, because it is an opportunity to achieve liberation.[304] His position aims to help people prepare for death, rather than explaining it. This is complementary to the Hospice Movement.

Christopher Carr wrote an article comparing aspects of Western and Tibetan 'death experiences' which is insightful. He concludes: "Most basically, it appears that the death space, at least for Euro Americans and Tibetans, is much like life in its essential purposes, functioning, and meanings. It would appear that the death space is a reality for learning, based on choice, and offering opportunity for growth."[305] Carr then follows the position of Sogyal and sees the links in experiences around death across traditions.

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[301] Sogyal, Rinpoche. *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*, 332.

[302] Holecek, Andrew, *Preparing to Die: Practical Advice and Spiritual Wisdom from the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition* (Shambhala Publications, 2013).

[303] About Andrew, "Andrew Holecek: Author on Dreams, Meditation and the Art of Dying." Andrew Holecek, September 26, 2024, https://www.andrewholecek.com/death-and-dying/%20%20--%20https://enroll.embodiedphilosophy.com/tibetan-book?fbclid=IwZXh0bgNhZW0BMAABHQdNj1Fajdr69EY0E55JAYWQblCsEJR8sykMP3hsctst7YL2xU41SbzINw_aem_v26dAh2uiGjYKR-drObC-g&utm_source=facebook&utm_medium=paid&campaign_id=6616355681356&ad_id=6616355984156.

[304] Holecek, *Preparing to Die* 3.

[305] Christopher Carr, "Death and near-death: A comparison of Tibetan and Euro-American experiences." *Journal of Transpersonal Psychology* 25 (1993): 59-59.

Tibetan Ideas About Consciousness It is clear that much of the content of Tibetan philosophy focuses on the study of 'mind' and the empirical practice of working with 'mind' in meditation. The claim is that the control of mind and the taming of the wild undisciplined 'monkey mind' can aid spiritual progress and even result in liberation. The theme of consciousness is central in Vajrayana. B. Alan Wallace argues that the Tibetan Buddhist theories of mind offer much insight and can contribute to Western discussions on consciousness.[306] His own dedication to bridge the gap between physics, science and spiritual approaches to consciousness are exemplified in his lifelong work still ongoing out of the Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies.[307] Wallace's position is that Buddhism is a middle way avoiding the inadequate polar views of both scientific theories about objective reality and the instrumentalist view.[308] I agree with the Middle Way being the most plausible.

David E. Presti applauds Wallace's contributions and says. "Observation of the mind itself is the strength of the contemplative traditions of the world, and the union of contemplative and scientific methods may yield a true contemplative science that revolutionizes our understanding."[309] The Buddhist approach calls the Western secular assumptions about the body and mind into question. The Western search for mind in the brain with a microscope and PET scans is at an impasse, whereas the Buddhists explore the mind in meditation, and do not limit it to the brain. Release from assumptions, and an open-minded approach to understanding the

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[306] B. Alan. Wallace, *Mind in the Balance : Meditation in Science, Buddhism, and Christianity* (Columbia University Press, 2014). B. Alan. Wallace, *Hidden Dimensions : The Unification of Physics and Consciousness.* (Columbia University Press, 2007). Dalai Lama, *Sleeping, Dreaming, and Dying*.

[307] Julie Kaye, "Dr. B. Alan Wallace - Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies." Santa Barbara Institute for Consciousness Studies, January 15, 2024, https://sbinstitute.com/about/dr-b-alan-wallace/.

[308] B. Alan Wallace, *Choosing Reality*.(Snow Lion, 2003). The instrumental theory is the view that concepts cannot describe things that exist independently of the concepts.

[309] David E. Presti, Bruce Greyson, Edward F. Kelly, *Mind beyond Brain : Buddhism, Science, and the Paranormal* (Columbia University Press, 2021), 2.

nature of consciousness can lead to more progress in understanding both life and the after-death condition.

While belief in survival after death is seen as old fashioned or wishful thinking in the secular West, in Tibet it is taken for granted. Since Buddhism rejects both scientific naturalism and the Cartesian dualism of dominant Western theologies, it offers another voice to the debate that is valuable and offers new solutions to the problem of consciousness. Wallace teaches the important role consciousness plays in the universe according to quantum physics.[310] He presents "presents a "special theory of ontological relativity," proposing that mental phenomena do not emerge from the brain, but rather all mental and physical processes arise from another dimension of reality that exists prior to the bifurcation of mind and matter."[311] He suggests that Buddhist methods, such as meditation, offer a way to explore the 'world of ontological relativity.'[312] In *Mind in the Balance* (2014) he argues That despite their differences, both Christianity and Buddhism have a similar insight into the nature of consciousness.

I would say that they both accept it as eternal and beyond the body and locate the nature of self in a greater concept of cosmic reality. Both have developed practices of meditation and mystical inner exploration and introspection. Wallace gives reasons why Science has rejected these approaches.[313] I think science has shown interest in analyzing the effects of meditation on human health and physiology but has shown less interest in the non-physical and quantum aspects of mind exploration.[314] Tibetan Buddhism offers varieties of meditational forms, but all aim to quiet the mind, and connect it in its natural state to the inner consciousness that is part of

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[310] B. Alan Wallace, *Hidden Dimensions,* viii.
[311] B. Alan Wallace, *Hidden Dimensions*, ix,
[312] B. Alan Wallace, *Hidden Dimensions*, x.
[313] Wallace, B. Alan. *Mind in the Balance* 2014, 21.
[314] Presti et al. *Mind Beyond Brain*,121.

the outer consciousness. Wallace suggests that meditation is valuable in many ways, and I would add that it is a way to prepare for the Bardos after death. Wallace calls Buddhist meditation 'inverting consciousness – of turning awareness upon itself,' with the result that awareness is not limited to inside the body but extends out to the universe without limit.' [315]

Science still explores the universe by looking into space with telescopes, but Buddhists use the inner telescope to explore reality, as Wallace puts it, using the 'inner telescope of *samadhi*'.[316] The culmination of meditative practice and the goal is the experience of a form of consciousness, the highest of the eight forms of consciousness, referred to as *alaya vijnana* (storehouse consciousness), the source of all experience. which involves bliss Luminosity and nonconceptuality.[317] Carl Becker's comprehensive and informative book on all aspects of death and Buddhist afterlife beliefs provides much insight into Vajrayana worldviews.[318] Comparing Tibetan to other forms of Buddhism he states that the Vajrayana, having evolved from the Yogacara Mind Only school in India, goes one step further "it asserts that ALL phenomena and experiences are ultimately no more than illusory projections of consciousness – the material level being merely a grosser distortion of truth and reality than the spiritual level." [319] The *alaya-vijnana* storehouse consciousness, is so similar to an atman, excepting that is changes from moment to moment and is impermanent only in that sense. However, Becker points out that it

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[315] Presti et al. *Mind Beyond Brain*, 80.

[316] Presti et al. *Mind Beyond Brain*, 83. Samadhi in the Buddhist view is a focused state of awareness with unified mind focus, absorptive contemplation and the last of the eight steps to liberation.

[317] Presti et al. *Mind Beyond Brain*, 91. - *alaya-vijnana* is a part of mind that stores things outside of our conscious awareness. It is not the 'clear light' not liberation, but it does provide the meditator with clear insight into the nature of reality, and it is from here that mental processes emerge. Presti et al. *Mind Beyond Brain*, 93.

[318] Carl B. Becker, *Breaking the Circle: Death and The Afterlife in Buddhism* (SIU Press, 1993), 87.

[319] Becker, *Breaking the Circle,* 89.

"experiences, judges, contemplates, and remembers, this constituting a locus of identity and continuity through many apparent bodies or lifetimes." [320]

This level of substrate consciousness is outside the physical realms, outside the brain, in a nonmaterial form of reality. Wallace presents an eloquent description of how death and reincarnation occur. The *jiva* or life force which accompanies the mind stream of consciousness, and which carried karmic imprints and memories and tendencies, can be viewed as a field of information, beyond mind and matter. He provides the analogy of our reincarnation being like a piece of software (*jiva*) being transmitted by the wireless internet connection into different hardware devices (bodies).[321]

Philosophical Implications and the Nature of Consciousness from a Tibetan Perspective

David Presti recounts the story of a Tibetan Buddhist monk who raised the point to a scientist that science ought to investigate the "weird things", of which he had experience, and he referenced also reincarnation, telepathy NDEs.[322] I have personal experience of Tibetan siddhis, and so-called paranormal events are accepted as part of Tibetan and Tantric spirituality. There is much room for discussion and collaboration between philosophers from all religions and scientists from all regions of the world. Russian scholarship for example is shrouded in mystery for most Westerners but they have reputedly carried out scientific psi research and Mongolian

[320] Becker, *Breaking the Circle,* 90.
[321] *Breaking the Circle,* 107.
[322] Presti et al. (2021) 122. The first International Symposium for Contemplative Studies took place in Denver, Colorado on April 26–29, 2012. Video recordings of presentations at the 2012 meeting can be found on YouTube, archived through the Mind & Life website.

Buddhist and shamanism research.[323] (e.g., the work of Leonid L. Vasiliev from the Institute of Brain research in Leningrad.)[324]

Science might be used to dismissing religious practitioner and patients who have NDEs, but I think they ought to take both more seriously, because both groups have veridical first-hand experiential knowledge. If these experiences do not fit into the current paradigm, then perhaps someone ought to ask why and investigate the borders of knowledge and seriously consider claims. There is the old story in folklore that medieval peasants were ridiculed for claims that rocks fell from the sky, until meteors were confirmed a few centuries later. Also, While Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) stood trial under the Roman Catholic Church for his claims that the Earth revolved around the Sun, now the tables are reversed and Science puts religion on trial. Presti refers to the Alan Wallace's view that "for millennia "meditators in different contemplative communities across the globe have systematically explored and reported their findings on inner reality and its connections to outer phenomena." [325] In a similar vein, Presti argues for the Tibetan approach to psi and consciousness be taken seriously, when he says:

> Buddhism and other contemplative traditions have been developing refined procedures of introspection and applying them to investigation of mind for more than two thousand years. A great many highly intelligent and dedicated people have been engaged in these investigations. Might not these methods of introspective exploration and their associated philosophical frameworks (worldviews) have led to discoveries and insights about mind and reality that can inform and complement the ideas of Western science? [326]

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[323] Mongolian and some Central Asian parts of the former USSR share a similar form of Buddhism to that of Tibet. Guy Lyon Playfair, "Psi Research in Russia, Psi Encyclopedia," October 23, 2024, https://psi-encyclopedia.spr.ac.uk/articles/psi-research-russia.

[324] Leonid Leonidovich Vasiliev, *Mysterious Phenomena of the Human Psyche* (University Books Inc., 1965). L. L. Vasiliev, *Experiments in Mental Suggestion* (Hampton Roads Publishing Company, 2002).

[325] Presti, David E., Bruce Greyson, Edward F. Kelly, *Mind Beyond Brain : Buddhism, Science, and the Paranormal* (Columbia University Press, 2021), 132.

[326] Presti, *Mind Beyond Brain,* 132.

Our heliocentric solar system, aptly named Sol after the sun, is now accepted. Anthropocentrism has been rejected by mainstream science, and humans were removed from being the center of the universe. Perhaps religious claims remain in unspoken threat, for if the universe is made up of consciousness, and humans are a part of it, then human life regains its lost purpose, the Earth is the creation made for humans again and is no accident of evolution. NDEs and Buddhist cosmology suggest that the universe is indeed conscious, purposeful, and intelligent and that humans and animal life are no mere accident. The cherry on the top of such "heresy" to the modern ear, is the suggestion and idea that the Sun may even be a conscious being![327] While some take *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* as metaphorical, the Tibetan interpretation is more literal. It is believed to represent a correct cosmology and process. The idea of the text as 'scientific' is supported by the scholar Robert Thurman and by David Presti.[328] However, it is not the sun but the "Clear Light of the *Dharmakaya*" which is the center and source of everything. Presti says that this light is the Ultimate Truth, a positive phenomenon and not negative emptiness, but Nirvana, the final goal.[329]

Are Bardo visions as self-projected such as those reported by Delogs or described in *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* 'real'? Is what is seen actually exist or without ontological independence? The visions seen in the Bardo are one's own projected visions which come out of one's fears and mental state. It is important to self-identify with all the visions in the Bardo. Such realization can be a way to gain liberation. Lauf says. "*The Tibetan Book of the Dead* teaches

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[327] Rupert Sheldrake, "Is the sun conscious?" *Journal of Consciousness Studies* 28, no. 3-4 (2021): 8-28.
[328] Presti, *Mind Beyond Brain,* 126.
[329] Presti, *Mind Beyond Brain,* 126.

that the Buddhas are only the visible forms of the inner, pure Buddha-Nature of awareness, representable manifestations of the enlightened nature of man which is always present in him."[330]

This does not mean that the Buddhas do not exist, they do, but in the Dharmakaya form that cannot be perceived by beings not at that level. There is a metaphysical reality to them, even if they are mind projections. This is difficult to understand for unenlightened beings. Projections do not mean imaginings, but simply seeing something real but forming an illusory image. When a deity is perceived, the truth is that it's Buddha Nature, Dharmakaya, is our own Buddha Nature, so it is like looking in a mirror.[331] Western science and Near-Death Studies can benefit from considering these Tibetan insights and teachings, which offer new perspectives to understand body-mind connections and even the nature of reality itself. Tibetan Buddhism has a modern understanding of the nature of consciousness, and this holds the key to understanding and explaining NDEs and anomalous experiences.

Different kinds of people see different things after death. I can only speculate as to the reason for this but perhaps projections match the personality, state of mind, social, cultural, and religious background of the experiencer. It might explain why Westerners don't see the wrathful Buddhas, and why Tibetans don't see Joseph Smith in a Spirit World. Psychedelic trips are well known to reflect the state of mind of the person having the trip. Personal projection therefore appears to have a significant role in how the experience unfolds. Afterall, choice and intention create our own reality on Earth, outcomes, and results of actions. The afterlife works in a similar manner, both in LDS and Tibetan contexts. Tibetan teachings emphasize again and again the power of mind and thoughts to create and shape our perceptions in all the Bardos. Agency still

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[330] Ingo, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan,*224.

[331] Trungpa, Chogyam, *Transcending Madness: The Experience of the Six Bardos* (Shambhala Publications, 1992), 157.

operates, right decisions are still important, and progress until the goal of either exaltation or liberation is required. Tibetans say the Bardo involves much mind projection, but that does not mean it is all fantasy…. there is an absolute and real fabric with which the Bardo Being interacts behind the visions. Thoughts and decisions create the destination, be it Pure Land, Rebirth, or liberation. This is the power of consciousness manifesting a reality. Our afterlife reality is in many ways a mind projection on the screen of consciousness. This allows for 'individuality' so long as ego deludes, and diversity as well as a collective experience with other entities. As Chögyam Trungpa said, you are only the watcher, and when you look into a mirror you see yourself reflected back. Go along with the Bardo and let it happen.[332]

[332] Trungpa, *Transcending Madness.*

Chapter Five

Comparisons and Conclusions

If untold Buddha-lands are reduced to atoms,
In one atom are untold lands, and as in one, so in each.
The atoms to which these Buddha-lands are reduced in an instant are unspeakable,
And so are the atoms of continuous reduction moment to moment, going on for untold eons; These atoms contain lands unspeakably many, and the atoms in these lands are even harder to tell of.

—Sakyamuni Buddha[1]

When Kisa Gotami sought out the Buddha Siddhartha to resurrect her child, he listened to her pleas with compassion and said, "Go enter the city, make the rounds of the entire city, beginning at the beginning, and in whatever home no one has ever died, from that house fetch tiny grains of mustard seed" [2] She soon realized after going house to house that no one was unaffected by death, and she returned to the Buddha. He had taught her that there is only one unchangeable law in the universe: All things are impermanent.

The only permanent things that do not change are perhaps the absolutes, the *Dharmakaya*, or Heavenly Father and His Celestial Realm. Even if we remain ignorant our religious traditions give us ways to frame and navigate life and death.

To recap: In Part One I looked at Mormon VTEs and explained how they are reflective of Mormon doctrines and culture. This is similar to the work of Mormon scholars who have collected and curated VTEs and typically presented them down in a doctrinal setting.

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[1] A 'quote' from the Buddha in the *Buddhāvataṃsaka Sūtra*'s 30th book, in Thomas Cleary, *The Flower Ornament Scripture: A Translation of the Avatamsaka Sutra* (Shambhala Publications, 1993), 891-92.

[2] Edwin A. Burtt, *The Teachings of the Compassionate Buddha* (New American Library, 1982), 45.

In Part Two other groups, as seen of scholars from various disciples were discussed ranging from scientists and psychologists to philosophers. Each provides valuable insights and strategies to explain NDEs. There are varied explanations, and all are equal, in their speculative nature. There are explanations that appeal more to some people than others, but none are superior. It is a matter of faith and opinion. NDERs do not require academic explanations, their own experience is enough for them. The reader must decide what resonates with them. Ultimately when we die, we will find out.

In Part Three I discussed *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and its impact on Western attitudes to dying and death. I showed how the Delogs and VTEs share parallels despite their differences. I can see connections between all the different perspectives presented in this dissertation and I am confident that in the future NDEs and anomalous experiences will be better understood.

In Part Three I discussed *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and its impact on Western attitudes to dying and death. I showed how the Delogs and VTEs share parallels despite their differences. I can see connections between all the different perspectives presented in this dissertation and I am confident that in the future NDEs and anomalous experiences will be better understood.

There is not one answer to the mystery of the after-death state however each perspective described in this dissertation offers a way to contemplate our own deaths. Hoffman's physics can explain the interdimensionality and timelessness of the Otherworlds. Capra can explain the mystical aspects. Van Lommel's description of non-local consciousness can explain so many of the NDE and VTE features such as telepathic communication. Greyson offers convincing arguments to take NDEs seriously. Jung's idea of the collective unconscious can help us leap

into the idea of a 'cosmic unconscious mind.' Kastrup and Spira can help us question our own identity and its relationship to reality, and the idea of our perceptions as illusion. Tibetan Buddhism can explain our ability to project and co-create our own realities and afterlives as well as a multiplicity of realms. Kripal gives us the courage to take a leap of faith and to reexamine our own beliefs.

I believe that NDEs and anomalous experiences found on social media and in popular books will greatly impact the future of human spirituality and contribute to new forms of religion. I can go as far as to claim that NDEs are part of a new religious attitude and movement of personal spiritual growth within modern society. Given the disenchantment of the past centuries, reenchantment, and seeing the world from a more spiritual perspective seems to be operating as many humans adjust to a more individualistic, and self-directed spiritual journey. Many choose to follow a faith rather than just inheriting it. Humans seem to have a need for a spiritual worldview. This explains the power of New Age beliefs[3] and other modern movements, as well as conversion to groups such as Hare Krishna. The LDS Church sends out missionaries and finds many converts in those hungry for meaning in life. In the 20th century the decline of all religion, even its extinction was predicted as science and atheism rose. Church numbers have plummeted, but I do not think most humans have lost their spiritual needs or sense of spirituality.

Internet based spirituality is flourishing, and it can overcome barriers to joining a group based on distance and other factors. It is just that the structures and institutions supporting that aspect of humanity have changed in the West. The desire to have an afterlife continues even when formal mainline Christian teachings decline in their outreach. The non-Christian faiths

[3] New Age beliefs draw many ideas from various places, but they echo descriptions of the Otherworlds descried in NDEs. e.g., Akashic records, preexistence, spirit communication, soul groups and life plans before birth.

remain staunch in their afterlife views. New Religious Movements evolve and fulfil this desire to survive bodily death. Spiritualism and psychic mediums remain popular. While some dismiss the afterlife as wishful thinking, as mentioned before, simply wishing to survive and 'actual' survival are two different things. Actual survival is a possibility, and if indeed our spirits did exist before this life, perhaps we have an innate instinct for the truth of our immortality. In this dissertation I begin by examining Mormon VTEs. I set them in context and demonstrate their common elements, which include many Mormon specific elements above and beyond those of traditional NDEs. I then zoom out to look at Near-Death Studies and the various academic explanations that might explain the phenomenon, including Western and Eastern views. I then describe Tibetan Buddhist views in the afterlife and find that it offers unique insights into understanding NDEs.

With a comparative view, continued consciousness seems to be the common denominator in all NDEs, despite the cultural differentiation in some elements. The Tibetan mind-based approach complements the thesis that universal consciousness is the fabric of all realities/reality behind all anomalous experiences such as NDEs. To recap I will remind the reader of what I have presented so far in this dissertation. Part One began by introducing the background of Mormon VTEs or Veil thinning experiences, which includes visions, such as visions of ancestors in the LDS Temples, or visions church leaders experienced of spiritual beings, dreams, deathbed experiences and near-death VTEs. I then explained some of the context of the theology and cosmology of the Mormon worldview. I then presented data on many Mormon VTEs and explained the eighty elements therein contained (as presented in the appendices). As previously mentioned, scales can help with categorization and comparison between such as between Mormon and Tibetan experiences, but they do not provide an

explanation for why NDEs occur. Other disciplinary suggestions and theories are required for this. Then I discussed basic patterns found in these experiences, patterns that show that Mormon VTEs share many common features with generic NDEs, but also include specific elements that are Mormon. Example of Mormon elements might be seeing Joseph Smith, Seeing Jesus and Heavenly Father in the forms expected, Seeing the Spirit World and Mormon activities being carried out. Specifically, the Mormon Spirit World is a physical and tangible place and one's personal identity as a Mormon is retained.

This section also contained a literature review of key Mormon scholars who have written on this topic. In part two I introduced comparative theological perspectives. I gave a background of the wide field of Near-Death Studies and a literature review of some of the key thinks in this area. I separated their approaches into scientific, supranatural and supernatural explanations for NDEs. These NDE explanations also cover VTEs and Mormon experiences because they delve into the possible causes and conditions producing the experiences. I suggested that there are many different types of explanations divided into Western and Eastern approaches. I also suggested that discoveries in psychedelic studies contain similarities with NDEs and therefore that NDEs can be seen as a class within a wider genre of extraordinary anomalous experiences.

Some NDEs might be made up or embellished but there are so many thousands out there. Can they all be lies? It only takes one to be proven correct to change the paradigm. That said, trying to prove that NDEs are 'real' from an Earthly perspective is not straightforward and likely as impossible as proving love exists. Both love and NDEs cannot be put in a petri dish to be examined under a microscope. It could also be argued that it really does no matter whether NDEs are proven 'real 'or not, because sooner or later we will all find out the truth. For myself seeing the transformative effects, the living of life with new meaning and the way human relationships

ae put first rather than material things, and the loss of fear of death is of equal importance. With faith in an afterlife, the life upon Earth is valued, lived without fear, and with full appreciation for the mysterious miracle it is. Having religious experiences are not just linked across traditions, but across modalities. Let no labels such as NDE, VTE or Bardo or Delog journey, limit us in the cross similarities between all anomalous experiences caused by different factors.

As previously demonstrated many persons report NDE like experiences from taking psychedelics, from breathwork and meditation, hypnosis and regression, from dreams, and mystical visions. I suggested that the realms experiencers discuss in their experiences might be similar, the same or related, and that the different points of access to these realms are like different doors to a mansion. Each door can be accessed using a different technique, an NDE, and OBE, taking a psychedelic, or meditating. I considered the interplay between experience and culture, noting that cultural coloring is real but does not explain all aspects of the experience, which seems to emanate from an independent realm or source. Then I branched out into what are the main arguments in philosophy and cognitive studies/consciousness studies concerning NDEs. I looked at idealist and Advaita Vedanta philosophies and then offered a chapter on the Tibetan Buddhist philosophies of death, afterlife, and consciousness. This brings me to the conclusion where all these different strands converge and tie together like Indra's web.[4]

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[4] Richard H. Jones, *Piercing the Veil : Comparing Science and Mysticism as Ways of Knowing Reality* (Jackson Square Books, 2010), 140. Timothy Brook, *Vermeer's Hat: The Seventeenth Century and the Dawn of the Global World* (Profile Books, 2010), 22. Brook writes, "Buddhism uses a similar image to describe the interconnectedness of all phenomena. It is called Indra's Net. When Indra fashioned the world, he made it as a web, and at every knot in the web is tied a pearl. Everything that exists, or has ever existed, every idea that can be thought about, every datum that is true—every Dharma, in the language of Indian philosophy—is a pearl in Indra's net. Not only is every pearl tied to every other pearl by virtue of the web on which they hang, but on the surface of every pearl is reflected every other jewel on the net. Everything that exists in Indra's web implies all else that exists."

Having read, listened to and collected literally thousands of NDEs, VTEs and other reports of deep weird religious experiences I am impressed by the patterns, consistency and similarities despite cultural differences and time periods. Before I began my dissertation, I had a basic understanding of this topic and had some preliminary speculations, but my journey has led me to new conclusions and understandings. I have included much background information and literature reviews in my dissertation, referring to multiple writers and this was necessary because my topic involves so much input from many disciplines. Unless all these diverse disciplines are included and brought together a complete picture cannot be constructed. I built my thesis on the foundations of the life work of many writers and intellectuals. Their work is all interconnected, even though at the time they wrote, they did not see the bigger picture, of how their work fits into a more accurate understanding of consciousness and the nature of reality.[5] Human progress comes about by comparing and adding to the voices of our predecessors, much akin to completing a jigsaw puzzle. Many puzzle pieces remain absent, but each individual voice contributes to progress. In the 21st century we now witness more serious consideration given to psi and paranormal topics. The United States senate is seriously debating UAP's for example, unknown phenomena that also seem to appear out of a different dimension and even claims that they respond to telepathic communication.

All altered states of consciousness events, and anomalous experiences, which are recorded throughout history, and still occur today, are now getting more serious scrutiny instead

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[5] Torin Andrew Alter, *Consciousness in the Physical World : Perspectives on Russellian Monism* (Oxford University Press, 2015). Susan Blackmore, *Conversations on Consciousness : What the Best Minds Think About the Brain, Free Will, and What It Means to Be Human* (Oxford University Press, 2006). Paul M. Churchland, *Matter and Consciousness : A Contemporary Introduction to the Philosophy of Mind,* Rev. ed., (MIT Press, 1988). Stuart R. Hameroff, Alfred W. Kaszniak, and Alwyn Scott. *Toward a Science of Consciousness II : The Second Tucson Discussions and Debates* (MIT Press, 1998). Giulio Tononi, and Christof Koch, "Consciousness: Here, There and Everywhere?" *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society B: Biological Sciences.* 370, no. 1668 (2015): 20140167.

of being dismissed as the superstitious claims of crackpots. Reviewing my data and reading the theories of my peers and predecessors has led me to develop my own thesis about NDEs and religious experiences, and it is based on my understanding of consciousness and the nature of reality. I seem to have found a home in panpsychism and non-dualism.[6] I would qualify this to say that neither a theistic or non-theistic, dual or non-dual explanation is superior and there is no winner yet in the league of speculative theories. I am arguing that modern science only has a partial and incomplete understanding of these two fundamentals and is poorly equipped to investigate the invisible and intangible. Imagine that we live in a box, our universe is a box, and it has its own conditions within the box. Since we cannot get outside the box we cannot see it from the outside. I believe that when humans enter an altered form of consciousness and escape the confines of the body and the box, we can have a brief glimpse of what is outside that box. My thesis embraces diversity, it allows for 'truth' to spear, like a diamond, with many faces. There is room for the Spirit World and the Bardo and for other 'heavenly realms' and Otherworlds that might be experienced. Hypothetically here may even be heavens for non-human beings on other planets or universes that we know nothing about! I see the cosmos potentially as so much more complex and all-encompassing to be beyond all our possible imaginations.

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[6] I believe Mind has always existed and did not emerge. Hence, I do not support the theory of emergentism. As David Chalmers pointed out the issues of assuming consciousness could be explained in only physical terms, the Hard Problem of Consciousness. This can be avoided as Christof Koch suggests with his 'Integrated information theory.' He has called IIT "the only really promising fundamental theory of consciousness". Carl Zimmer, *(20 September 2010).* "Sizing Up Consciousness by Its Bits". *The New York Times. (Retrieved 23 November 2015).* David John Chalmers, *The Character of Consciousness*(Oxford University Press. 2010). David John Chalmers, *The Conscious Mind : In Search of a Fundamental Theory* (Oxford University Press, 2004). Christof Koch, *Consciousness : Confessions of a Romantic Reductionist* (MIT Press, 2012). Christof Koch, *Then I Am Myself the World What Consciousness Is and How to Expand It* (Basic Books, 2024). Christof Koch, *The Feeling of Life Itself : Why Consciousness Is Widespread but Can't Be Computed* (MIT Press, 2019).

Mormon and Tibetan ideas of the afterlife are very different, more differences than similarities. However, both strongly assert the continuation of conscious awareness. This continuity of continued consciousness after bodily death is the key to understanding NDEs. Even though cultural context strongly influences what is experienced in the afterlife, it does not explain the veracity of NDEs away.... it only explains their nuances and content but not the mechanism behind them and of continued awareness. Psychedelic visions are so similar that it can also be argued that they too seem to touch on this realm of consciousness that science has no explanation for. My theory negates the idea that consciousness arises from the physical brain and asserts that it is non-local. Our consciousness exists in the otherworldly realms, I propose, and we filter it through the brain much as a cell phone receives information via Wi-Fi from the cloud. When we die, the phone is broken, and we 'exist' in the cloud. NDEs provide glimpses of this realm, but whether we receive another kind of body or reincarnate, is still a mystery. So why do some people have NDEs and not others, again amnesia has been explained in VTEs as a way to remove memories of the preexistence so as to maintain free will in our Earthly life, and to ensure spiritual progress and choice. Amnesia might be imposed on those who would not benefit from remembering. Everyone dreams during rem sleep, but few remember their dreams and memories of dreams after awakening soon fade. I often experience lucid dreaming, and can alter the outcome of my dreams, and I propose that the Bardo and afterlife are similar with ability to imagine and change outcomes at will. If we are part of a Universal Consciousness, as children of God, we too have creative abilities. We can co-create these afterlife realms too, just as Vajrayana suggests.

Our ability to co-create our afterlives avoids the pitfalls and simplicity of classical perennialism. i.e., the universal here is not the afterlife per se, but the continuation of conscious

awareness, and it allows for diversity. [7]Mormon VTEs can describe a solid and physical place similar to but better than Earth, and the Buddhist Bardo of Becoming sems to be a dreamy void that it not solid where visions and hallucinations occur made out of mind projections, which is the opposite of a solid Mormon type realm. This contrast between a solid physical afterlife and its opposite non-physical Bardo are not necessarily contradictions, because both could exist within the ocean of consciousness. If we can project a solid Earth in life, then we can project a solid afterlife. Solidity or lack of if a creative choice we have in our personal afterlife. However, The Mormon Spirit World is very physical, and children can be procreated and born there, marriage continues, but also supernatural where people can create their own homes, fly, survive without food. Bardo Beings also possess these psi qualities, so there is similarity within difference. The Buddhist doctrine of self-created visions, just like Jorge Ferer's analogy of us being on different life rafts heading for different beaches on the same ocean, illustrates this point.

I considered the idea that the afterlife realm has qualities similar to an egregore, group think, thoughtform,[8] or something like René Guénon's collective entity, expect instead of applying to an entity it applies to an otherworldly place.[9] It might relate to a *tupla*, as explained by Alexandra David-Neel (1868-1969) which has its own independence unlike a hallucination.[10] This, along with cultural preconceptions, might explain why people see different realms or

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[7] Humans have cultural variance and also within a culture there is personality variance. Some Western nations contain non-Western minorities and their NDEs reflect their non-Western culture and religion more than their geographical residence.

[8] The term 'thoughtform' is also used in Evans-Wentz's 1927 translation of the Tibetan Book of the Dead. Evans-Wentz, W. T. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: Or The After-Death Experiences on the Bardo Plane, according to Lāma Kazi Dawa-Samdup's English Rendering*. (Oxford University Press, 2000), 29–32, 103, 123, 125.

[9] Kate Strong, "What Is an Egregore? - Know Thyself, Heal Thyself - Medium." *Medium*, January 5, 2022, https://medium.com/know-thyself-heal-thyself/what-is-an-egregore-dbc71d9e4447.

[10] Madame Alexandra David-Neel, *Magic and Mystery in Tibet* (Courier Corporation, 2012). Hallucinations are rarely shared and have no logical pattern. The afterlife seems to be a consensus reality just as we reach a consensus about perception on Earth.

landscapes during their NDE however I think that the Otherworlds still exist in ontological independence. It is not just wishful thinking otherwise atheists such as Eben Alexander would not have seen the unexpected. There is something there independent of our projection onto it that intelligently seems to appear to us in a way we will accept and understand it. In Otherworlds, an afterlife exists independently of our perception of it, we perceive it and interpret it, and co-create aspects of it, and it shows itself to us in a form we would comprehend, and the vision is a result of the intermingling of all these factors. Tulpa's are not ontologically independent and constant, but consciousness and the *Nirmanakaya, Dharmakaya* and the Spirit World are. Whether we see the *Bardo* of Becoming, or see the Spirit World, it is essentially a similar realm within Universal Consciousness. I might even go as far to suggest that the Spirit World is a form of Buddha Field.

Comparison of Tibetan Buddhist and Mormon Experiences

It is to be expected that different cultures and religions experience slightly different terrains and encounters with different deities in their afterlives, despite constant universal elements such as autoscopy and telepathy. The afterlife as described in NDEs and VTEs mirrors concepts held by the experiencer, such as Jesus or Buddha. Thus, Mormons see Jesus and Tibetans see Buddhas and both realms are outside space and time in another dimension. This can also be explained by the role of religious imprinting, our biases and lenses, on top of an experience. The common denominator is that they see beings significant to them. There is a mirror effect with our observation of the world being a reflective reality reflecting back into our

perception, depending on our lens that can be understood by considering quantum physics and the nature of consciousness.[11]

There are many similarities and difference between Tibetan Buddhist and Mormon afterlife experiences. There are different levels of comparison also, the level of the individual, the community, and the religious tradition. Widening out the lens both have implications for humankind at large. When comparing the afterlife experiences of Mormons and Tibetans at face value I was struck by some observations. Mormons stress 'agape',' love' and Tibetans use the world 'compassion,' but these are deeply rooted emotions, deep human concerns for those we love and all beings on the planet, and this is the common message learned from otherworldly experience shared by Lamas, Delogs and NDErs.

Mormon VTEs appear to be more passive, in that the experiencer just flows along with events as they unfold, and receive whatever visions offer themselves. Although there is great faith and prior knowledge of the Spirit World, it is a more passive entry than the average Tibetan who enters their version of the afterlife, the Bardo in active mode trying to be fully aware. The salvation of the Mormon rests with Heavenly Father, Jesus Christ and the soteriology of its theology. The average Tibetan is aware in contrast that salvation, which in this case is an exit from Samsara, depends on the action of the individual in the Bardo and the skillful means applied when faced with predictable visions. There is however a variation, when calling out to

[11] The *bardo* and the spirit world are there, we don't necessarily create these realms, but we create our experiences in these realms. Our Earthly perspectives and expectations are reflected in this realm like a mirror. The afterlife seen in NDEs can be part of a group consensus reality. A consensus reality is when a person projects their imaginings onto a screen and then the projections of everyone else matches what is on the screen. This is how co-creation works when your mind helps fashion a new reality. Reality beyond form is infinity.

Amitabha for rescue to his Pure Land, and depending on his power as a Buddha, can lead to the desired outcome.

The similarities and differences are indeed very nuanced. Both Tibetans and Mormons have an element of choice in the afterlife, and they would agree all beings do. Although behavior on Earth, acceptance or rejection of the Gospel, and karma might propel one into the afterlife with some temporary outcome, subsequent decisions it the afterlife can lead to a better outcome e.g. someone in Spirit Prison might accept the Gospel and be released, or someone who missed the first appearance of the pure light Dharmata might make decisions further in the Bardo that lead to liberation or a better human birth. Both stress responsibility and self-judgement as revealed by the life review and karma. Freewill and choice are two other similarities between Tibetan Buddhist and Mormon narratives. One reaps what one sows on Earth, deeds here affect the quality of the afterlife.

Also, the rituals done on Earth can help the beings in the Otherworlds. In both Mormon and Tibetan systems there is an emphasis on individual responsibility and freedom to choose the right spiritual path and ethical behaviors. While Tibetan embrace full reincarnation, the Mormon idea of the preexistence does come partially closer with the idea of human incarnation from a former spiritual state, than most other Abrahamic religions. Both agree a new body of some sort is required in the spiritual path, be it resurrected or ‘reincarnated’.

In both Mormon and Tibetan contexts there is the aspect of the textual and doctrinal versus the experience of the ordinary person. In both cases there is a strong correlation between what is written in texts and what is experienced. Of course, the texts of the two traditions do not agree but there are some similarities on the elements of the ordinary persons, of Mormons and Delogs. The similarities are not in the types of visions but in the capabilities of the continuing

consciousness. Both traditions agree that conscious awareness continues after death. The Delog and the VTEr both seem to keep their personality, and their spirit body is free to roam and go through solid objects and is invisible to the living. They meet entities, friends and relatives, and have moral knowledge shared and are told to bring messages back to the living in this regard.

The life review could be compared with meeting Yama, the knower of all karma. However, while VTEs are generally positive, Delog reports are often frightening. Also, while at first, I thought that the being of light might have a connection to the light of the Dharmata in the Bardo, after further reading I think it is right to be more hesitant about making the comparison. While references to light in both traditions are linked to the 'ground of all existence or being' it is too naïve to go further and argue that one is God, and the other the Dharmakaya form of Buddha. I do not think that it is the personal versus the apophatic here.

This leads me to mention the danger of cultural cross comparison in religious studies. While the core theory is very tempting, and seems logical on and simplistic level, it has serious philosophical hurdles to overcome. I expect dead humans may in fact, if there is an afterlife, go through a similar process in a similar dimension, but this is different from saying that Christianity and Buddhism come from a common source. So many complex factors throughout time shape a religion, and much of the shaping involves practical and cultural factors. Similarities are as likely to come from common human conditions as from a transcendent source. e.g., both Mormon and Tibetan 'judgments' involve ethics and aspects of ethical choices made in one's lifetime. While on the surface killing and stealing tend to be universally condemned ideas, one cannot say that there is a universal human form of ethics. Ethics like religion are bound up in culture and in some cultures some forms of killing and taking of property have been justified.

For example, Mormons have been linked to polygamy and some Tibetans to polyandry, but most human societies would see these lifestyles as a breach of ethics.

The crucial agreement is that Mormons and Tibetans believe that our consciousness is eternal. Both Mormon doctrine and Tibetan Buddhism reject creatio ex nihilo and see the universe as eternal and uncreated. Both are universalist, allowing for other types of humans to be incorporated into their system. Both agree there was an existence before this life, only Mormonism rejects reincarnation. Nevertheless, pre-existence and the idea of choosing your family is shared. In the experiences telepathic communication, a life review with introspection, and the ability of the entity to have an OBE and autoscopy is reported. The Mormons really do, most of them, take the idea of the Spirit World literally. Lay Tibetan Buddhists might take Buddha Fields literally, and commentators would say that their outer level understanding cannot negated. It provides rebirth for them in Sukhavati and from there they can progress to inner teachings and rise to become Buddhas. Both traditions emphasize personal spiritual progress in the afterlife, both set stages before the full salvific goal is achieved. Now the Mormon Spirit World, like a Buddha Field is a temporary steppingstone to the celestial kingdom. When people reach their full potential, they go through a process of apotheosis and take charge of their own world on another planet and populate it with children. Although different, this has echoes in my mind for the idea that each Buddha can create his own Buddha Field. Buddhas are not gods, nevertheless in both system they represent the pinnacle achievement of spirituality and share in great powers which include omniscience and full agency.

Both Mormons and Tibetan Buddhists agree that the essence of humans is essentially good and pure. There is no doctrine of Original Sin as in Roman Catholicism. Tibetan Buddhist teaches the idea of Buddha Nature, which is are our core, only masked in ignorance. Both

systems offer a chance to attain and progress to our full potential as fully exhaulted humans (apotheosis). Jeff O'Driscoll said, "In NDEs experiences often realize their own divine essence as children of God, striving to be more like God, or even becoming gods in some future day. So, it is with my divine parentage. By virtue of being a child of God, I am a god already. I may grow and learn and become more like my Divine Parents."[12] The Bardo Being chooses the womb of its mother and Mormon spirit children chose their parents.

Other similarities are 1) the belief that the consciousness or spirit leaves by the crown of the head, as mentioned in some VTEs, Amy Call, Chad Daybell, and Peter E. Johnson. 2) the idea that prayers and blessings (administrations) by the bedside of the sick could bring the sick person back from death 3) belief in the spirits of the dead being able to see and hear us whilst remaining invisible 4) the common occurrence that the dead do not realize they are dead. Most humans are unable to see the spirit bodies of those out of body. Pedersen for example reports that he tried to communicate with a nurse in the hospital by touching and talking to her, but she was unaware.[13] These subtle bodies can walk through solid objects. The 'dead' can read the thoughts of the living. 5) Aim in both religions is to find truth and knowledge and to escape ignorance and delusion. 6) The negative impact of a sinful selfish life on our afterlife condition. 7) Both agree that there is no creatio ex nihilo and that the universe is eternal.[14] 8) Both experience lights and these lights are associated with something pure, loving and 'divine' or "Buddha like'. The light surrounds God, the light is the *Dharmakaya*. It is loving, caring, involved and alive. It makes the

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[12] O'Driscoll, *Not Yet*, 61-62.

[13] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 79.

[14] There is a Mormon idea of a multiverse with other inhabited planets. Jesus created the heavens and Earth (Mosiah 3:8—3 Nephi 9:15) but he only organized elements that already existed (Abraham 3:24). See Kirk D. Hagen, "Eternal Progression in a Multiverse: An Explorative Mormon Cosmology." *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 39, no. 2 (2006): 1-45.

experiencer feel wonderful and loved.9) the soul and the conscious entity in Tibetan Buddhism are eternal and uncreated. Both existed before birth on Earth. 10) Both religions honor the group: church and sangha.

The main differences are the different forms of the entities and the landscape, as well as a linear timeline towards resurrection versus a circular samsaric cycle with reincarnation. That said both posit different qualities of time and space in these realms. Other dissimilar aspects are that the Mormon connection to family, which is part of the Plan of Salvation and Families are Forever doctrines, are in direct opposition to Tibetan ideas that attachment to family on one's deathbed can negatively affect ones Bardo journey. Possessions are given away, and Earthly ties cut. Monks and nuns have already cut family ties in life as renunciates. So, the ideal Mormon is married and the ideal Buddhist a celibate monk! However, the ideal of the Boddhisattva to rescue all sentient beings shows that there is still a community aspect in the idea of the universal salvation of all sentient beings in Tibetan Buddhist doctrine. Another difference is that Bardo Beings are not able to return like NDErs. So, there is disagreement about how far into the afterlife the deceased has penetrated. Secondly the Mormon afterlife is absolutely physical, Heavenly Father and Jesus have a body, and this is taken literally, unlike in some other Christian denominations. The resurrection of the body is a central doctrine, based on the resurrection of Christ. Tibetan Buddhists see the body as illusory, and a temporary vehicle that can be discarded and replaced in the next reincarnation. For them reality is mental and made up of ignorant mental projections. The Spirit World is a very physical place and the whole vision of the afterlife is one of physicality, literally having bodies of flesh and blood restored, and with an anthropomorphic view of Heavenly Father and Jesus. Only the Holy Ghost is more formless and etheric person. The emphasis is on married couples, families, and community.

The Tibetan view in its inner and secret essence is very transcendental and mysterious, unembodied, and devoid of self. Self, community and everything else is not separate from the unity of the *Dharmakaya*. All separation into components is an illusion. We are the Buddha. We all have a Buddha Nature. Here again comparisons are complex. For in Mormonism and Tibetan Buddhism the inner core and potential of every person is good. There is no fall in the garden to Eden that condemns humankind under the doctrine of original sin. Everyone is redeemable in both systems. Of course, no Tibetans see Joseph Smith and I have not yet read of a Mormon seeing the Buddhas, but Tibetans actually have an answer for this quandary. It is not just that cultural conditioning predisposes us to seeing what we expect but that the Buddhas will appear to humans in the religious forms those humans will expect. For the visions reflect our essential nature and personality. In this case whatever is on the other side, whatever that consciousness is, comes to us in a language and form that is familiar.

We co-create our heavens, but there is something there to be manipulated and formed beyond our own efforts. Are the Tibetan and NDE experiences egregores?[15] Or are we part of a multiverse or simulated reality? It is all a guess. There does seem to be a play (*lila)* between consciousness and form, with afterlife being another 'form' in a multiverse of all possibilities. I would like to think there is room for both the Bardos and the Spirit World. Delogs see gardens and palaces, as Mormons see cities with streets of gold. Both agree on a life before birth, but Mormonism rejects rebirth a second time. Whereas Bardo Beings see do not see Joseph Smith, Mormons do not see lights emanating from Buddhas. In both cases those who have 'died' and returned only saw the 'other side' briefly and it might be proposed that those who are dead for

[15] Mark Stavish, *Egregores: The occult entities that watch over human destiny* (Simon and Schuster, 2018). Greek ἐγρήγορος, egrēgoros 'wakeful') is an esoteric concept representing a non-physical entity or thoughtform that arises from the collective thoughts and emotions of a distinct group of individuals."

over a week might have totally different and unknowable experiences to us. [16]How Buddhist Lama's decided the Bardo lasts 49 days is a mystery because no one has been dead that long and returned. They would say it is part of a past life and Bardo memory able to be retrieved in deep meditation perhaps. Also, whole Mormons have seen the Spirit World briefly, entering deep into the celestial Kingdom, is not reported and indeed some heavenly areas will not be accessible until after the Last Judgement for most humans.

Mormons tend towards a personal relationship with a divine holy family of God the Heavenly Father, Jesus the Son, The Heavenly Mother, and The Holy Ghost. There are ancestors, angels and Satan. The Tibetan world is filled with Buddhas and dakinis and nature spirits. Both accept a supernatural view of the Otherworlds. The Mormon view is dualistic, and the Tibetan view is monistic. Mormons embrace hierarchy, and the identity of the individual. Tibetans eschew clinging to an identity or ego and stress our essential similarity in our Buddha Nature. It could be argued that neither dualism nor non-dualism (monism) are superior, and that the ocean of universal consciousness has the capacity to absorb both polarities. If these is one universal consciousness that is aware, knowing and 'divine' ground of all being, it could be ALL THINGS and also ONE. It includes all processes, differentiates into seemingly separate parts and then reabsorbs them, sometimes in form realms and sometimes in non-form realms, and potentially in any dimension into infinity. I do not believe that our human intelligence can fully grasp the enormity of this eternal and infinite consciousness but hold a faith that it is part of us all and that death involves some kind of return to our origin in this field of consciousness.

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[16] NDErs are briefly 'dead' whereas delogs and Bardo Beings spend long Earth days in their experiences. The time periods differ. NDErs and delogs can return but Bardo Beings cannot.

Again, comparison of the phenomenological and the doctrinal aspect of Comparative Eschatology is fraught with obstacles. My conclusion is that all humans continue in consciousness and perhaps see and even co-create some form of heavenly otherworld, akin to dreaming. However, there is no proof, and this is just my personal faith-based speculation. It would be a fool who claimed to have afterlife theories all worked out. So, if afterlives are unknowable wither by Science or Theology then why study them? Perhaps the most to be gained is not by focusing on death but on life. If one can live with faith in an afterlife, then living life on Earth can be taken more seriously and enjoyed as a precious gift. Both Mormons and Tibetans take community aspects of the afterlife seriously, and the goal is not just a selfish desire to be saved or reach liberation, but to have all beings reach this state together. Hence the Mormon ideal of spreading the Gospel and the Tibetan ideal of the Bodhisattva, striving to help all sentient beings. It is in loving and aiding each other in connection, in the web of life, that we achieve the greatest goal, and in realizing that our consciousness is interconnected, and our actions and choices affect each other.

Numerous Western academics, as aforementioned, have seen parallels between NDEs and the *Bardo Thödol*. Paul Badham argues that there are theistic and non-theistic after death experiences. He notes that visions of the Light, and OBEs occur across traditions and writes: “The descriptions of what happens after death in this work correspond very closely to what contemporary near-death experiencers report.”[17] Referring to the *Bardo Thödol* he says: the person’s "consciousness-principle gets outside its body" he sees his relatives and friends gathered round, observes their weeping and watches as they remove the clothes from the body or

[17] Paul Badham, “Religious and Near-Death Experience in Relation to Belief in a Future Life,” *Mortality*, (1997): vol. 2 no.1. 7-21.

take away the bed. [18]He also repeats the tradition that "The Dharmakaya (The Divine Being) of clear light will appear in whatever shape will benefit all beings."[19] He agrees with Lama Govinda that: "The illusory Bardo visions vary, in keeping with the religious or cultural tradition in which the percipient has grown up."[20] Badham argues that there is much in common with NDE accounts across cultures except that specifics are colored and described through a cultural lens.[21] He goes further and argues that the closest parallels to theistic heavens are the Pure Lands which he calls' mind-dependent' worlds and he compares meeting the divine in theistic accounts with the meeting with the Buddhas of Boundless Light, Wisdom and Compassion.[22]

If I develop his thesis here, one could suggest a parallel between the Mormon Spirit World too, as a sort of Pure Land for Mormons. This might be a stretch to argue however it might explain the dearth of non-Mormons there, and why in the afterlife 'bords of a feather' tend to 'flock together', or like attracts like. Badham notes how the Smaller Sukhavativyuha-sutra describes the Pure Land as being filled with flowers of vivid colors, and jewels. This is akin to the descriptions of the Spirit World. Indeed, the word paradise is of Zoroastrian origin, the Avestan word *pairi-daêza* and Old Persian word *Pardis* which came to Europe through the Greeks, who had crossed Persia, and who called it *parádeisos* (παράδεισος), which essentially means garden with a walled enclosure. Badham mentions Carl Becker's remarks about how reminiscent modem NDEs are to accounts in Chinese and Japanese literature concerning "those

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[18] Badham, Religious and Near-Death Experience, 17. W. Y. Evans-Wentz. The Tibetan Book of the Dead, 98,101.

[19] Badham, Religious and Near-Death Experience, 5-6.

[20] Badham, Religious and Near-Death Experience, 6. Evans-Wentz The Tibetan Book of the Dead, lxii.

[21] Badham, Religious and Near-Death Experience, 6.

[22] Badham, Religious and Near-Death Experience, 6.

who have been to heaven and back,"[23] and he notes also that surveys in India and America among Christians, Jews and Hindus all present closely similar reports. J. C. Hampe in Germany comes to the same conclusion.[24]

Lama Yeshe explains what a Pure Land is we transfer our consciousness to a Pure Land. From the Buddhist point of view, a Pure Land is not some place out there waiting for you. Pure means it's a reflection of your own pure thought, your own pure, clean clear mind. That's what we mean by Pure Land. Any environmental manifestation, good or bad, comes from the mind; it does not truly exist externally, from its own side, out there.[25] Lama Yeshe explains using *phowa* so that consciousness is directed out of the top of the head, which will allow freedom to choose one's destination or rebirth. The illustrious Kenneth Ring found many similarities between the Tibetan Book of the Dead and NDEs, but he also found many differences, which he warns should be noted. Like myself he found the modern Delog experience closer to NDEs than the textual Tibetan Book of the Dead.[26] This is because NDEs and Delog experiences are direct personal experiences. The Tibetan Book of the Dead is a guidebook on the afterlife, not a personal experience, but I think it was written because knowledge of these realms had been previously known and experienced. Ring calls it an experienced based teaching about the nature of death.[27] It is aimed at helping the experiencer in the actual post death period. In an article discussing these links he alludes to the history of these comparisons. Scholars in this genre

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[23] Carl Becker, *Paranormal Experience and Survival of Death*. (State University of New York 1993), 90-91. See also his earlier article - Becker, Carl. "The Pure Land Revisited: Sino-Japanese Meditations and Near-Death Experiences of the Next World", Journal of Near-Death Studies 4, no 1 (1984): 51-68.

[24] J. C. Hampe, *To Die is Gain*, (Darton Longman and Todd, 1979).

[25] Thubten Yeshe, and Thubten Zopa. *Life, Death and after Death*. (Lama Yeshe Wisdom Archive, 2011). 96 Also many VTEs mention the consciousness leaving the body out of the crown of the head.

[26] Kenneth Ring, "A New Book of the Dead: Reflections on the Near-Death Experience and the Tibetan Buddhist Tradition Regarding the Nature of Death." *Journal of Near Death Studies* 12:2 Winter (1993): 79.

[27] Ring, New Book of the Dead, 83.

cannot be notice an obvious similarity in experiences, even lesser-known aspects such as the notion of suggested reincarnation in the Western NDEs.[28] Ring says that "the elements that comprise the experience of dying can be expected to show, over time and culture, a certain uniformity. But in the same way that all human bodies show the same structural similarities but can appear in very different dress according to one's time and culture, the NDE's surface appearance may be expected to show similar variations…In short, the NDE is not a purely endogenous phenomenon but is in part called out by the zeitgeist." [29] He adds that motifs of salvation, liberation and the need to live in harmony with others united these experiences.[30]

I still have many questions. From a Tibetan perspective how can Mormon VTEs be explained? Is it even legitimate to read VTEs from a Tibetan perspective or not? In some ways comparison is possible, as long as one understands that two different cultures and religions are involved. Yes, from a certain position a Tibetan perspective can be enriching, however a full understanding requires stepping out of both traditions and considering the role of consciousness. Can the idea of non-local consciousness and universal consciousness provide room to incorporate both Mormon and Tibetan perspectives of the afterlife? Yes, I believe this is the key to explaining afterlife experiences. on the level of consciousness, a universal human phenomenon, the two afterlife experiences can be compared more directly. Both NDEs and the Spirit World attest to a survival of consciousness after death and a journey into the afterlife. In both Bardo and NDE situations there is peace and wellbeing felt, there is freedom from physical pain, consciousness expands and survives outside the human body, there is autoscopy, and OBE, encounters with other entities or loved ones, a radiant light seen, access to knowledge and

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[28] Ring, New Book of the Dead, 78.
[29] Ring, New Book of the Dead, 82.
[30] Ring, New Book of the Dead, 83.

understanding, and the experience is more real and vivid than everyday life. I believe that the focus in Comparative Theology should not be on comparing many of the more personal cultural elements but rather in finding the experiential constant i.e. consciousness. Quantum physics describes spooky action at a distance and the relationship the observer has on an observed particle. [31]Tibetans use the word *Namshe* to describe the illusion of duality in our world. This is the appearance of separation between the observer and the observed. In reality there is no separation, however. [32] Both inner and outer perception is not always what it seems, and it can be deceptive, on this Science and Tibetan Buddhism agree. I believe collaboration will make strides in discovering the mystery of consciousness.

It is important to die well, in a positive mood, and to be prepared so that your visions, influenced by your state of mind, do not frighten you. Mormons who die in a state of faith are not frightened but encounter what is comforting and familiar. Those with an unresolved heavy shadow self, or fear are people more likely to have negative NDEs. If as Tibetans suggest, the Bardo Being co-creates the visions in the Bardo, then Mormons can co-create the Spirit World, and so it follows that multiple realms might possibly exist without contradiction. Just as each human on Earth has a unique perspective of life on Earth, so each deceased person might have a personalized and appropriate heaven and attract there those of a similar vibrational level or tendency. Since the Dharmakaya or Universal Consciousness is so huge and extends without limit to all eternity, there is room for multiplicity and all possible number of worlds and expressions of heaven and realms. As an analogy if there is a screen, representing consciousness,

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[31] Michael Talbot, "Talbot on Swedenborg: Swedenborg and the Holographic Paradigm." https://www.swedenborgstudy.com/articles/science-math/mt88.htm (accessed 7/21/2024).

[32] Pema Chödrön, "What Goes Through the Bardos?" *Tricycle The Buddhist Review,* Winter 2022, https://tricycle.org/magazine/pema-chodron-bardos/.

then each of us see a different movie. The nature of how movies are projected are similar, but the content and quality differ depending on our preferences. There are Mormon and Tibetan movies and many other types. All the movies take place in one cinema and in many respects are connected. There is a message to the Tibetan version of the movie, eloquently put by Pema Chödrön. The most fundamental message of the Bardo teachings is that "death happens every moment. We live in a wondrous flow of birth and death. One experience is the beginning of the next experience. It's like a river continuously flowing…and how we live is how we die."[33] Her position is that is all a journey, and I agree.

Death as a topic holds a central place in Tibetan Buddhism where death and life are not seen as separate, and death is considered the key to life. [34] Similarly in Mormonism life and death are intertwined in the Plan of Salvation. Both traditions agree on the possibility and hope for a universal salvation. In Mormonism and progressive spiritual development after death and the final judgement and atonement provide for the end of separation from Heavenly Father whereas in Vajrayana the Bodhisattvas work tirelessly to bring all sentient beings to *Nirvana*. In both traditions there is no need for suffering or even for eternal hell like the fire and brimstone Protestant imaginings. Escape from Spirit Prison is available by accepting the Gospel and forgiveness of sins, even Outer darkness is a choice. The Buddhist Hells are temporary, and one can be reborn in a higher realm with karmic improvement. Both systems display compassion and a chance for choice to count towards salvation, in accordance with a loving God or a loving *Dharmakaya*. In both traditions death is not an end, but a transformation into another form of

[33] Chödrön, Pema. *How we Live.*
[34] Reginald A. Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World: The Tantric Buddhism of Tibet* (Shambhala, 2001), 262.

existence. So, the key to the Vajrayana afterlife and Mormon VTEs is to understand the nature of personhood and consciousness. [35]

To properly understand consciousness, we need to have a concept of self that is not an illusion or one that does not correspond to reality. Vajrayana accepts continuity of consciousness but no permanent self.[36] Instead one form, one moment gives rise to the next in a chain of links that flow. In Mormonism our Earthly body is created and will be resurrected but our spirit body, personality and awareness are constant. Atheists and skeptics might suggest that this is talk of an afterlife is all imagination, wishful thinking and bogus. Even if heavenly realms and the Bardo involve much mind projection and co-creation, which does not mean it is all fantasy. A leap of faith is required, and those who hold religious views and those who reject them are likely not swayed by argument. I like to think of the afterlife realms and reality as the elephant in the story of the blind men. Buddha had a story about some blind men and an elephant. Each of them touched a different part of the elephant but they could not figure out the whole. [37] Consciousness is the elephant, and the blind men are the different types of academics and theologians. The moral of the story is that the quest to understand reality and the afterlife requires us to drop our blindfolds, join hands and cooperate.[38]

In this dissertation I have collected a great deal of information but how does it all fit together and how can we make sense of it all? The Mormon VTEs are completely different from the Tibetan Bardos and the Six Realms. It could be argued that even comparing linear with

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[35] Graham Coleman, and Thupten Jinpa, eds. *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: First complete translation*. (Penguin UK, 2008). Introduction.

[36] Coleman, *Tibetan Book of the Dead.*

[37] D. M. Strong. *The Udana, or the Solemn Utterances of the Buddha.*(Pali Text Society 1994), 68-69. Wallace, *Hidden Dimensions,*117- 118.

[38] Thomas Metzinger, *The Elephant and the Blind : The Experience of Pure Consciousness: Philosophy, Science, and 500+ Experiential Reports* (The MIT Press, 2024).

cyclic models of reality is an impossibility and that the perennialist venture has too many shortcomings. Yet, when we read these personal testimonies one solid fact stands out, that conscious awareness survives death, even if the heavens, Spirit Worlds and Bardos are of different qualities and characteristic. Also, while cultural influences are obvious and the nature of the afterlife seems to mirror the society of the living and its values, this does not explain everything. It does not mean we can leap from there to dismiss the veracity of the claims. As I read, I discovered that the Otherworlds are not just entered by way of NDEs or VTEs but also by dreams, OBE, Psychedelic trips, meditation, and shamanic journeying. Again, the common denominator here is consciousness, a form of altered consciousness which suggests the possibility that we are more than our apparent physical bodies. Holden Lee experienced both an NDE and then a trip on mushrooms, and he met the same entity on the other side both times! What can this mean?[39] Well, it means we do not understand the invisible world of consciousness and being.

The idea of survival after bodily death has been the default belief mode of most of humankind until the modern secular era. It ought not be dismissed too readily. I believe that studies on the nature of consciousness as part of the fundamental makeup of the universe is long overdue, and this might mean suspending that assumption that mind arose from matter. It is possible that mind gave birth to form and matter. This would fit with many theological perspectives especially non-dual philosophies. I agree with Paul Badham that he primacy of religious experience as the heart of religion and personal belief systems.[40] It is time for physicists

[39] Holden Lee, "I smoked DMT and met the same entity from my NDE," October 21, 2023, https://youtu.be/TaG-pm9-fbM?si=XUgxOhZuqHQfxD-.

[40] Badham, Religious and Near-Death Experience, 1.

and theologians to work together, ask the right questions and keep an open mind. For the time being there is no answer to explain the mystery of NDEs and anomalous experiences.

In arguing for the authenticity of some kind of afterlife awaiting us all, the number of witnesses matters. There are tens of thousands of reports which would constitute proof beyond a reasonable doubt, in a legal definition. Thousands upon thousands report the continuation of consciousness, telepathic communication, and instant travel in Otherworlds. Are we simply to dismiss this because our current level of science cannot 'see' or 'detect' it? Or ought we dismiss afterlife beliefs as wishful thinking as Freudians might, or a response to trauma and loss of loved ones in the world wars and political upheavals in Tibetan history? It all depends on one's perspective. It is an open question.

What Is Reality and How Does Consciousness Fit In?

Mormons and Tibetan Buddhist might have varying ideas of what a body, a soul or an afterlife entity are, but they agree that consciousness and awareness continues, and this is part of a greater spiritual progression and journey. It seems that losing a physical body in death, or disassociation from it using psychedelics, allows the consciousness mind aspect of our being to be freed and expanded. It is as if a body limits our free capabilities and powers, only experienced in out of body events. I find the aspect of the life review where the experience has retrospection of life events from all possible perspectives. e.g., if I yelled at my brother, I feel what my brother felt in that moment. It is as if the universe is a camcorder, records everything, and replay can be seen from all perspectives. When the body is gone, the minds of all actors can merge and share. Could this explain why in VTEs the 'dead' can read the thoughts of the living?

This is a fascinating observation that might be explained by a shared consciousness within the Universal Consciousness, and it speaks to our intimate connections with each other. In life bodies demarcate our individuality, but in the afterlife these barriers are taken down. Could this mean that, as Spira suggests and Tibetans suggest, that the ONE experiences illusory and temporary separateness in life? Is this the *lila* of God? The expansion of consciousness by role playing? Is this what Jesus meant when he asked us to treat our neighbor as ourselves, because we are our neighbor? The implications are astounding. Perhaps the purpose of Earth is really a mission, and the choice to love and serve over selfish attachment. Science is still locked into its naturalistic paradigm and finds it difficult to challenge its own materialistic assumptions. Part of the issue is funding and economics perhaps because brave studies into speculative and hypothetical areas receive less finding opportunities than ventures that promise to generate profit and financial success. Some professors also are comfortable and constrained from pushing the boundaries because being an academic outside is not a safe path careerwise.

Nevertheless, progress is managing to push forward in New Physics and in some of the institutions mentioned in part two. One example is that Universities such as Johns Hopkins and Imperial College London are taking up the study of psychedelics are a hiatus of decades in areas which study their efficacy in the alleviation of the fear of death with terminal cancer patients.[41] "In a survey study of more than 3,000 adults, Johns Hopkins Medicine researchers compared psychedelic experiences with near-death experiences that were not drug related and found notable similarities in people's attitudes toward death. Survey participants in both groups

[41] Kupferschmidt, Kai, "Hallucinogenic drugs help cancer patients deal with their fear of death." Science, December 1, 2016, https://www.science.org/content/article/hallucinogenic-drugs-help-cancer-patients-deal-their-fear-death. ScienceDaily, "Psychedelics May Lessen Fear of Death and Dying, Similar to Feelings Reported by Those Who've Had Near Death Experiences," August 22, 2022, https://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2022/08/220824152209.htm.

reported having less fear of death and dying after the experience."[42] Richard Schiffman's article said.

> There is something about the core of this experience that opens people up to the great mystery of what it is that we don't know…The core mystical experience is one of the interconnectedness of all people and things, the awareness that we are all in this together.[43]

Such studies have investigated how both NDEs and psychedelic drugs can help medical patients, and one study concluded that the most efficacious substances were ayahuasca and DMT. However, all these studies assumed that the experiences resulted from chemical reactions inside the skull, in the mush of the brain matter. None of these scientists, even those who noted similarities with mystical experiences, even pondered if the studies indicated a connection with a reality outside the skull and brain. It is still commonplace for modern humans to assume that humankind is superior and more developed and 'civilized' than ancient ancestors, but I suggest that in terms of insights into altered states of reality, ancestors and modern indigenous peoples living independently of the Western paradigm in the Amazon, other remote geographical areas and islands, are indeed more advanced in understanding altered states of consciousness. Rationality in spirituality has been on a pedestal for too long and it needs to share its podium with the intuitive, the gut feeling, the dream, the imagination, the personal experience, and the spiritual insights. These are not easy topics for science to study. NDEs and altered states of consciousness are solitary journeys so it is difficult for scientists to study them, and it is easier to

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[42] Marisol Martinez, "Psychedelics May Lessen Fear of Death and Dying, Similar to Feelings Reported by Those Who've Had Near Death Experiences." *Johns Hopkins Medicine*, August 24, 2022, https://www.hopkinsmedicine.org/news/newsroom/news-releases/2022/08/psychedelics-may-lessen-fear-of-death-and-dying-similar-to-feelings-reported-by-those-whove-had-near-death-experiences.

[43] Richard Schiffman, "Psilocybin: A Journey Beyond the Fear of Death?" *Scientific American*, February 20, 2024, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/psilocybin-a-journey-beyond-the-fear-of-death.

measure those promoted by drug ingestion, because waiting for dangerous near-death event' in a lab is ludicrous and unrealistic.

Last Thoughts on Consciousness and NDEs

When readers encounter NDEs of VTEs they can engage on a level of enquiry that matches their perspective, meaning that what they bring to the engagement can reflect their worldview also. A reader can reject it, accept it on a religious level to bolster faith, to excite curiosity and change beliefs, or to ask deeper metaphysical questions about the nature of reality. Different scholars provide different explanations but ultimately it is one's own decision and choice to react and judge their impact on one's own worldview. There are many explanations and many suggestions but ultimately from a human standpoint we are limited to speculation and faith. Imants Barušs is a leading scholar who investigates death, NDEs and the afterlife from the perspective of altered states of consciousness.[44] My thesis and his work seem to agree. He supports the survival hypothesis and argues for the veridical properties of afterlife experiences. The stresses the continuity of phenomenal consciousness which "appears to be an experiential stream suffused with qualia." [45]The question of asking if the experiences are real or true is also misleading. Perhaps it is the wrong question to ask. They are real for the experiencer. They are, I believe as real as dreams. The dream is real but the contexts perhaps a mirage. It might be that visions of the other worlds are similar, a co-created mirage, affected by our personalities and

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[44] Imants Barušs, *Death as an Altered State of Consciousness : A Scientific Approach* (American Psychological Association, 2023). Imants Barušs, *Radical Transformation: The Unexpected Interplay of Consciousness And Reality* (Imprint Academic, 2021). Imants Barušs, & Mossbridge, J. *Transcendent Mind: Rethinking the Science of Consciousness*(American Psychological Association, 2017).

[45] Barušs, *Transcendent Mind,* 220.

cultural expectations, to be a dreamlike state. If consciousness does continue after the body dies, then this is a possibility.

The Tibetans believe that dreams and the Bardo correlate and are just experiences at different levels of consciousness, and mind projections. Perhaps the afterlife is our own minds making up our own movies. Whether the afterlife is ontologically independent and chooses to 'meet us' in a manner we find intelligible is another possibility. Or perhaps we are all part of consciousness coming into form and returning into consciousness, as tiny bubbles in the whole. Speculation about what exactly is occurring could be endless. However, in the future Science and Theology need to examine the nature of consciousness more and keep an open mind, because it is the key to understanding afterlife experiences and beliefs. All we can see is five percent of our universe, with 69% composed of dark energy and 26% dark matter. It is really venturing into the unknown![46] We have also seen how psychologists, scientists and quantum physicists have suggested alternative versions of reality. Jeffrey Mishlove wrote a first prize award winning essay exploring the survival of human consciousness, sponsored by Bigelow, and it is significant that both men are convinced that the key to explaining NDEs lies in a revised understanding of consciousness. [47] I agree wholeheartedly with Mishlove when he states:

I see the way to break through this impasse is to challenge the axioms people rely on when they reject the accumulated evidence. One axiom derives from Hume's argument that

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[46] Dark matter passes through regular matter without affecting it this is like a OBEr going through a wall. Are the invisible afterlife realms related to dark matter? Where are they? This is the mystery. Ghosh, Pallab. "CERN: Scientists Search for Mysterious Ghost Particles.–BBC, 25 March 2024."

[47] Jeffrey Mishlove, "Beyond the Brain: The Survival of Human Consciousness after Permanent Bodily Death." *Bigelow Institute for Consciousness Studies (2021),* https://www.bigelowinstitute.org/. New Thinking Allowed with Jeffrey Mishlove "Researching the Afterlife With Robert Bigelow," August 20, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hgguQup5EXw.

human testimony can never suffice "to prove a miracle." [48] In response, I have pointed out that postmortem survival is both normal and natural from the vantage point of idealist metaphysics. I have also highlighted the importance of human testimony in the respected phenomenological tradition within philosophy.[49]

He notes that white crow examples of verifiable NDEs such as Peak in Darien[50] events provide more than enough evidence to take the phenomena seriously. VTEs contain examples of both of these. He also references the idea of the quantum soul, previously mentioned by Stuart Hameroff, developer of the Orchestrated Objective Reduction (ORCH OR) model.[51] Mishlove is often dismissed by his peers as a parapsychologist, but when it comes to truth, no one has a monopoly on it.[52]

Co -Creation and Relationship

There are people who believe that thoughts and affections do not really reach out around them, but occur within them, because they see their thought processes inside themselves, and not as remote from them; but they are quite wrong. As eyesight has an outreach to remote objects and is influenced by the pattern of things seen "out there," so too that inner sight which is discernment has an outreach in the spiritual world, even though we do not perceive it. [53]

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[48] David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding and Other Writings* (Cambridge University Press, 2007).

[49] Mishlove, Beyond the Brain, *92.*

[50] A Peak in Darien event is when the NDEr meets someone in heaven that they did not know wee dead, or even exist, until after their return. See Mishlove 2021 38-39 , 95. Bruce Greyson, "Seeing Dead People Not Known to Have Died:" Peak in Darien" Experiences." *Anthropology and Humanism* 35, no. 2 (2010): 159-171.

[51] Center for Consciousness Studies at the University of Arizona has a website: https://consciousness.arizona.edu/orch-or. Mishlove, *Beyond the Brain*, 51, 18. Mishlove states "Hameroff and Penrose hypothesize consciousness occurs at the quantum level, inside tiny microtubules within neurons." Mishlove, *Beyond the Brain*,18.

[52] Truth claims are another branch of Theology and out of the scope of this dissertation.

[53] Swedenborg, Heaven and Hell, 203. Michael Talbot, "Talbot on Swedenborg: Swedenborg and the Holographic Paradigm," https://www.swedenborgstudy.com/articles/science-math/mt88.htm (accessed 7/21/2024).

Part of this process of consciousness coming into physical form and then reabsorbing into consciousness involves our own co-creative abilities. As vessels that contain awareness we can think, reflect and bring things to emerge in our lives through free will and choice. Likewise in death what is seen and experienced might be also a co-creation of our human mind aspect. This might be temporary or not, but VTEs describe how ancestors live in their dream homes, and eat their favorite foods, and it seems that thinking about where to go in spirit when out of the body results in instant 'travel' to one's destination. In the Bardo the power of the mind to create and be victim to self-deception is the whole theme of the experience. Our illusions, delusions, and desires shape our realities whilst in the body and after the death of the body. Just as our personalities and cultures shape and co create our dreams, they also shape our afterlife. Science might be able to investigate our dreams to a certain extent but not the after-death experiences. On what or where should the microscope or telescope be pointed? Thus, any investigation of the reality of afterlives and consciousness requires the interdisciplinary cooperation of all kinds of academic, scientists and theologians. Ferrer asserts that there is a reciprocal relationship between the human and the divine. He says also that humans shape their religious worlds.

Historically enacted religious forms likely guide but also constrain the visionary and mystical possibilities available. [54]This idea also occurred to me, for as humans shape their religions and cultures, why not their afterlives too? Heavens do tend to mirror the Earthly societies of their inhabitants, 'as below, so above,' and the idea of the microcosm and the macrocosm. NDErs enter the realms where thought creates form, the realm of shapeshifting and where the malleable creation of imaginations and landscapes is possible. It is a realm described

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[54] Jorge N. Ferrer, and Jacob H. Sherman. *The Participatory Turn: Spirituality, Mysticism* (State University of New York Press, 2008), 144.

by quantum physicists outside the physical as we know it, beyond time and space, where telepathic communication and access to all knowledge is the defacto state, without limitations. As in the Quantum Physics observations the observer affects the observed, and our minds affect all minds, and in the spirit worlds everything is affected by our perception of and interaction with it. Life and the afterlife are participatory states of being and as experiencers we interact with the realm in which we find ourselves. We are the observer in the Bardo. These realms are more than places, they are states of being outside time and place. Life and afterlives are not a *tabla rasa*, a blank slate, they demand interaction, and we create, mirror or interpret as much as we passively experience. They are here, everywhere, just invisible to us now. Heaven is in our hearts and is not some removed place like some distant Deist God. We are part of this wholeness and unity and separation is the illusion.

Mormons stress the community aspect of their faith and worldview. Mormons are connected by blood, family and Temple ritual to be one giant extended family, and it is in personal relationship that salvation is framed. Tibetan Buddhists also believe in the ultimate connectedness of all sentient beings, in that they share the one Buddha-nature at their core. As children of God or 'little Buddhas' we all carry a good essence that has the ultimate potential. Samuel Morris Brown, who wrote perhaps one of the best books on Mormon death and dying and the dead, emphasizes the great importance of Mormon communalism, and this is also reflected in my VTE narratives, especially in visions of ancestors. These ancestors are dynamic and alive beyond the Veil, not dead and forgotten. Brown says that Joseph Smith, builder of immortal communities, perceived an ontological continuity between (im) mortals that grounded

the "literal family connectedness of humans and God" [55] Brown also says that we do not die alone, and that our covenants and loyalties and love survives human death. He ends his book saying, "The journey, hopefully extending through the breadth of cosmic space and time, mattered to the extent that it was undertaken with others.[56] Just as I argue that humans are part of the web of cosmic consciousness, so Brown states in Mormon language how we are part of the divine family in relationship. This is perhaps the key theme of the VTEs which show this early vision still continues in the modern world, as Brown says,

> Joseph Smith's struggle against death points out the impressive reach of an Antique-sounding view of cosmic integration within early Mormonism. At almost every turn the heavenly world informed, illuminated, and affected the Earthly world and vice versa, what some term the metaphysical law of correspondence. By acting out the drama of the cosmos, Smith and his followers could change the course of the cosmos. The microcosm of Earth life fed from and looked forward to the macrocosm of the heavens. The pedigrees of the sacerdotal heaven family mimicked and pursued the cosmic hierarchy of gods, angels, and astral bodies. [57]

Many opponents of Joseph Smith Jr. accused him of being a fraud, but I believe, based on faith, he had a genuine religious experience. At times others joined him in a shared religious experience. There are no shared hallucinations here, rather something akin to SDEs but rather SVTEs – shared Veil thinning experiences. When these visions occurred Joseph and his friends were in a reverent contemplative state, receptive to listening and hearing message from other levels of consciousness. There must be something to caves, mountains and Temples as places

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[55] Samuel Morris Brown, *In Heaven as it is on Earth: Joseph Smith and the Early Mormon Conquest of Death* (Oxford University Press, 2012), 278.

[56] Brown, *In Heaven as it is on Earth,* Afterword, 4.

[57] Brown, *In Heaven as it is on Earth,* 11.

where revelation can occur, they are often places set apart, quiet and conducive to a meditative mindset.

The Otherworlds and Co-Creation If the self or mindstream survives according to Vajrayana, NDEs and VTEs, and there are more personal aspects based on the perspective of the experiencer which are linked to family, friends and personal preferences, then what can be said of the picture of the afterlife landscape? We have read of paradises and beautiful locations, rural and urban settings, as well as warm and comfortable voids of darkness, like a cocoon. Are the afterlife realms an illusion? No more so that the Earth life illusion. I think we perceive a lot of our own personal projects in all realms. We are the screen, and different movies project onto it, and we mistake the movie for our true nature, rather than the screen, to use Spira's analogy. Perhaps the multidimensions, parallel universes, and other different interactive dimensions are without end and eternal arranged in many levels and hierarchies.[58] All reports, despite difference, concur it is a stable, and safe place, a home, with non-local and psi aspects, where travel anywhere is instant, telepathy and thought mind to mind communication surpasses spoken language, and where time is all now and past and future can be perceived.

We bring our preferences to the afterlife we experience and see the deities we expect to see, but this does not mean we invent everything there, or that it has no independent existence. I conclude that an afterlife realm is there independent of our Earthly preconceptions about it. It is a place where conscious awareness between entities exists, and it has its own intelligence and structure that links and connects all the entities in it. The realm is also partially a personal projection of the experiencer, in that my favorite people, food, buildings, my perfect idea of a heaven can be found and materialized. Some might experience an ethereal realm and others a

[58] Many religions and mystical traditions posit a hierarchy of heavenly levels e.g. Kabballah and Sufism.

solid realm like earth. It allows for multiplicity and diversity. It allows for a Divinity or for a non-dual expression. There seems to be a symbiotic relationship between what I desire to see, expect to see and my cultural expectations with what is revealed and shown to me. The afterlife has a symbiotic and interactive relationship with each of us in a personalized way. If we approach it positively or negatively this is reflected. Ferrer suggests that particular states the Buddhist jhanas, spiritual visions, and spiritual landscapes, the Buddha Lands, are largely or entirely constructed. i.e., they have a co-created aspect. He sees a role of human constructive powers operating in spiritual universes. He does not mean they are fabricated universes, "By conceiving spiritual universes and ultimates as the upshot of a process of participatory cocreation between human multidimensional cognition and an undetermined spiritual power, we rescue the ultimate unity of the mystery while simultaneously affirming its ontological richness." [59]

Co-creation, I argue, is the process occurring in these realms, as whatever exists interacts with our minds. As Pam Grout comments, "The nature of reality (I would add afterlife here too) is defined by how I choose to look at it."[60] So, in VTErs the Spirit World is filled with Mormons, not Vikings, Conquistadors or the Muslim Umma. They are all in their own places, in Valhalla, Roman Catholic heaven, and Jinnah. They all exist in spirit and laugh and are with family in relationship with the divine, and Buddhists are in Buddha Lands, having their own non-dualistic, nontheistic experiences. None are superior to the others. Universal consciousness can encompass all these diverse possible existences.

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[59] Ferrer, *Participatory Turn*, 144-145.

[60] Pam Grout, "This year's Nobel Prize Proves Our Minds Render Reality," December 9, 2022, https://pamgrout.com/tag/a-course-in-miracles/.

So, what is my afterlife going to be like? My afterlife will appear as it appears. I do not think I am advanced enough to reach liberation, but I hope to project a positive and happy experience. I would like good British, Middle Eastern and Indian foods, grassy parks, beaches, the best of company from my diverse group of friends and family. It will be an interfaith and loving place, accepting of everyone. I want to see its libraries and see all of cosmic history. That said, I am sure that whatever the afterlife is the first experiences and glimpses of it that are described by NDErs are only borderlands, and more as yet unseen realms might exist beyond, only available for entry when we are ready to enter. From these realms there is no return. It is a big adventure for which the best preparation is living the best life we can here and now. I have lost my fear of death, there is only fear of pain, but not of death. Living life is now easier when I can put its short duration into perspective from a bigger picture. We are only here for a miniscule period, a tiny nano second in eternity, so as the Buddhists say, we must make the most of having our precious human body.

My key takeaway as I end this dissertation is how rich the human experience is of both life and death and how precious it is. Referring back to Dahlberg, who advised collecting lots of data in fieldwork, I also think quality and analysis are of equal importance. I collected and could collect thousand more examples of NDEs and Delog stories, but they all seem to say the same thing to me. As a mother it is similar to hearing all mothers narrate their childbirth experiences, with differences, yes, but an overall pattern and similarity that seems so familiar. I have curated a unique and comprehensive collection of Mormon VTEs and demonstrated that they have a pattern and internal consistency and that they relate to non-Mormon NDEs. This suggests that something more than imagination or hallucination accounts for them and the next step is to ask what lies behind them. In a legal sense I feel there is circumstantial evidence to prove their

reality beyond a reasonable doubt, at least in my own judgement. I concede this is not scientific proof, but I do not think that this is possible given the limits of science. There is so much work for scientists to discover and a hope that in my lifetime a valid theory of consciousness will be the adopted paradigm. Talbot links the holographic universe idea to heavenly realms. He goes on to argue that in an ocean of potentiality, the brain picks out frequencies and converts them to images and produces *maya*, an illusion. He says, “What we really are, are "frequency receivers" floating through a kaleidoscopic sea of frequency, and what we extract from this sea and transmogrify into physical reality is but one channel from many beamed to us from a dimension beyond our own.” [61] If Talbot is correct, it creates a way to explain NDEs as the journey of a spirit moving from an amnesic experience in illusion to the source.[62] Hoffman points out that the 2022 Nobel physics prize proved local realism is false and that this is the nail in the coffin for physicalism and space time theory.[63] If as he says, that Conscious Realism is the mechanism by which perception of the physical world is a byproduct of consciousness [64] then I argue that perception of the afterlife worlds works the same way, as a byproduct of consciousness. Christof

[61] Michael Talbot, "Talbot on Swedenborg: Swedenborg and the Holographic Paradigm," https://www.swedenborgstudy.com/articles/science-math/mt88.htm (accessed November 11, 2023).

[62] What is less known is that Talbot claims to have been abducted by ETs/aliens and receive his theory from them. Swedenborg is also supposed to have met alien type entities in his heaven during his OBEs.

[63] Daniel Garisto, “The Universe Is Not Locally Real, and the Physics Nobel Prize Winners Proved It,” *Scientific American*, May 28, 2024, https://www.scientificamerican.com/article/the-universe-is-not-locally-real-and-the-physics-nobel-prize-winners-proved-it/. Simon Mundie, “Why Scientists Fail to Understand Consciousness,” June 3, 2024, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nLeOlyYH8eU.

[64] Donald D. Hoffman, *Visual Intelligence: How we Create What we See* (WW Norton & Company, 2000). Donald D. Hoffman, "Consciousness and The Interface Theory of Perception," *Edge Foundation* (2015): 1-33. Donald Hoffman, “Do We See Reality as It Is?” n.d., https://www.ted.com/talks/donald_hoffman_do_we_see_reality_as_it_is?subtitle=en (accessed April 2, 2023).

Koch's version of panpsychism is an approach I agree with, as well as his call that the central fact that we exist demands an explanation.[65]

NDEs take us outside the material realm, and by so doing they re-enchant our world, they return the human to a more central role in cosmic history but rather than suggesting a physical anthropocentric view of our role in the cosmos is it is a 'consciousness centric' view. Only metaphysics gives me room to speculate what reality lies behind them. What is it that allows for such experiences to occur and what does it mean? What is this realm that allows for such multiplicity of experiences and meets each entity on its own spiritual level of understanding? NDEs demonstrate that behind and beyond them lies a tremendous intelligent, alive reality which I call Universal Cosmic Consciousness. I want to focus on this here, rather than the narratives. NDEs suggest immortal life, a heavenly realm but a telos, a purpose to all existence and life. This Universal cosmic consciousness is loving, alive, and in relationship with all of us, part of us. Universal consciousness is the source, it is unity, but we can exist inside it as separate elements, being part of it but not all of it. We are part of one and one is in us. As Spira always says, we exist in the dream of God. This force directs our spiritual journey as we make choices to reconnect to it again, out of our forgetting we are part of it. It is as if Consciousness, to know itself, has to forget itself and come into form and then return to self. It is beyond theism or non-theism, beyond the induvial or ego, beyond all definition. It is our Heavenly Father, Our own Buddha, and our own potential divinity or Buddhahood.

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[65] Christof Koch, *The Feeling of Life Itself : Why Consciousness Is Widespread but Can't Be Computed* (MIT Press, 2019). Christof Koch, *Then I Am Myself the World: What Consciousness Is and How to Expand It* (Basic Books, 2024).

The wisdom I have gained from this dissertation is that our ultimate destiny rests in our own hands, our own efforts, not on some supernatural deity that dictates our fate. Afterlife experiences are visits HOME where we rest in our true nature and being. We have choice and agency and even when facing suffering we must choose to love and be compassionate in our relationships with others. We all need to prepare for death within our own traditions. Some will use Dream Yoga, or meditation, and others explore transcendence with psychedelics which are now being legalized for therapy.[66] Zaleski pointed out, "a comprehensive theory of near-death experience" would require a synthesis of "all of the medical, psychological, philosophical, historical, social, literary, and logical factors."[67] I stand with Sam Parnia M.D. that human consciousness does not become annihilated at death. [68] I think the theory of non-local consciousness needs to be taken seriously. I stand with those who embrace the "Deep Weird and Boggle Thresholds.'[69] We must see NDEs as one out of various alternate ways to access the Otherworlds. Like many doors and windows into a mansion.[70] We need to respect these experiences and learn from them. Finally, there is no superiority in dualistic or monistic experiences or paths, no superiority in theistic or no-theistic, only different ways to be conscious within Consciousness.

Both Mormons and Tibetans have faced persecution in recent times, and both have lived on a frontier and harsh landscape. Utah was beyond the 19th century frontier of the United States

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[66] Ricky Williamson, "Psychedelic Experience Isn't Just Brain Chemistry," IAI News, 17th February 2023, https://iai.tv/articles/ricky-williamson-psychedelic-experience-isnt-just-brain-chemistry-auid-2395.

[67] Zaleski, *Otherworld Journeys*, 181.

[68] B. Keim, "Consciousness After Death: Strange Tales From the Frontiers of Resuscitation Medicine." *Wired Magazine* 24 (2013).

[69] Jack Hunter, "Deep Weird: High Strangeness, Boggle Thresholds and Damned Data in Academic Research on Extraordinary Experience." *Journal for the Study of Religious Experience* 7, no. 1 (2021): 5-18.

[70] John 14:2-3 KJV. "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

of America and Tibet was until recently a 'forbidden land' sheltered from its neighbors by the Himalayas. The afterlife is also a frontier and one we must all cross beyond the point of no return. The secret of the universe is all about communication, interconnected consciousness and development. I can imagine universal consciousness like the outside of a Russian Matryoshka doll, with a smaller doll which is the NDE realms, another doll for the subconscious, and the smallest full of millions of tiny dolls. We can move mindfully through all layers and in certain states conscious thoughts from one layer can penetrate our own minds. We need to develop a paradigm that explains universal consciousness as a living energy field, as part of the very fabric of reality.[71] It would involve the Hard Problem of Matter. So, while on the surface the theory of resurrection seems to contradict the theory of reincarnation, they are in fact connected. Both involve the making of some kind of body for those who have died. Either the old body is resurrected in heaven, or a newly made body inhabited in rebirth. In the Bardo and Spirit World a temporary or subtle body is received. If mind creates matter, then it can create bodies as well as realms. If mind is in control, then whether time appears linear or cyclical, as in the Plan of Salvation versus *Samsara/Nirvana*, both are accommodated. Many accept the belief in the risen Christ, so this belief in the power of mind is not a great leap, just a reversal of the way we have come to think about how things in the universe are manipulated into existence.[72] NDEs and VTEs show the transition in space and time of the spiritual journey, beyond physical death, in a system of purpose and relationship with all other forms of consciousness, in a great immortal giant life cycle that progresses and grows eternally. This is how I see the nature of reality.

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[71] A Buddha Field is such an energy field.

[72] There is no classical creation, no creatio ex nihilo, in both these systems, but consciousness, including our own minds, is eternal. There is room within this for a 'creative' process in the growth and progress of conscious entities that enriches the universe.

We need to reevaluate the connection between the individual and the collective of humankind and see ourselves as enmeshed in Indra's Web, all part of universal consciousness. We are all part of something larger than ourselves. An understanding of our interconnection, as seen in the life review, could lead to a more peaceful, loving world, where we accept the 'other.' This would be the Kingdom of God on Earth. We live in a universe of all possibilities.

Reading all the VTEs and Delog accounts has left me moved and I feel their sacredness. Just as these experiences changed the experiences, they also change those who witness the testimonies. They are deeply moving and reveal the divine mystery beyond our comprehension. Reading all the VTEs and Delog accounts has left me moved and I feel their sacredness. Just as these experiences changed the experiences, they also change those who witness the testimonies. They are deeply moving and reveal the divine mystery beyond our comprehension.

I will leave the last word to Jeff Kripal who encourages each one of us to change our perspectives on reality, to "flip." I have experienced this flip, and I call on my readers to contemplate 'flipping' also.[73] My 'flip' involves questioning attitudes and assumptions and weighing different explanations, while keeping an open mind. Concerning anomalous states of consciousness, like NDEs, he asserts, and I agree, that we must recognize the centrality of the irreducible nature of consciousness.[74] To his position I had that there is not just one sort of 'flip', but multiple expressions of 'being flipped.'

"We must proceed through an intentional and systematic ontological shock if we are ever going to arrive at the future of knowledge."[75] (Kripal)

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[73] Kripal, Jeffrey J. *The Flip,*13.
[74] Kripal, Jeffrey J. *The Flip,*198-199.
[75] Kripal, Jeffrey J. *The Flip,*199.

Appendix 1

VTE Experiencers in Chronological Order

Lovisa Mack Tuttle 1784

Joseph Smith Jr. 1820- primary and secondary (vision in grove) Visions of Angels/Moroni Vision of Prophets 1832 (tar & feather incident)

Oliver Cowdery about 1829 vision of Prophet with Joseph Smith

Lorenzo Dow Young 1826 (dream vision - before he becomes Mormon)

Phoebe Carter Woodruff 1838 secondary source

William D. Huntington 1839

Brigham Young (illness 1847) visions and dreams

Harriet S. Beal 1852 (16 years old)

Mosiah L. Hancock (Wesley White book) 1855 vision of preexistence

Jedediah Grant 1856 (secondary Heber C. Kimball)

Jacob Hamblin 1858 (fell after cutting wood)

Harriet Ovard Lee 1860

John Powell 1967

Alpheus Cutler told grandson Abraham A. Kimball 1881

Charles D. Evans 1893

Thos. S. Thomas 1894

May Farnsworth 1888 (died aged 14)

Jennie Schnakenberg 1896

Peter E. Johnson 1898

President George Albert Smith 1947 Apostle 1909 experience

Lerona Wilson 1915

Joseph F. Smith 1918 (D&C 138)

Heber Quinley Hale 1920

Henry Moroni Zollinger 1920

Ella Jensen 1928

Hugh Nibley 1933

Betty Clark Ruff 1963

Russell Ricks 1966

Lawrence Tooley 1972

Betty Eadie 1973

Elane Durham 1976

Amy Tenney 1977

Vicki Umipeg (Widdison)

Kjirstin Youngberg (Widdison)

Rachel (Wesley White)

Sarah LaNelle Menet 1979

Scott Drummond 1981

John M. Pontius's Spencer 1983

"Katie" (child saved by Melvin Morse) (aka Kristle Merzlock-Westover) 1984

Ranelle Wallace 1985

Richard G. Ellsworth 1986

Chad Daybell [1985 1993]

Richard G. Ellsworth,

Frank Marion Purvis 1991

Angie Fenimore 1991

Kim Rives 1997

Jeffery Olson 1997

Suzanne Freeman 1999

Denise Mendenhall 1999

Richardson, Lance 1999

Ryan Rampton 2001

Amy Call 2003

Vincent Todd Tolman 2003

Julie Rowe 2004

Mark Pedersen 2004

Ralph V. Jensen 2004 x2

Jane Lea Dykstra Moe 2006 [Jane Moe]

K Holland Young 2012-2013

Joe David Wren 2016

Clayne Edward Wayman 2016-2017

Jeff O'Driscoll

Appendix 2

Eighty Elements Identified from the VTE Data

A.THE JOURNEY

(1) The Veil

(2) Out of body/autoscopy

(3) Indifference towards the body

(4) Tunnel/ Journey /Door – can be experienced both coming and going

(5) Guides and escorts for the dying and deathbed visitors

(6) White light full of love/ light/ peace joy bliss

(7) Blackness/ the void

(8) Place of despair (Protestant influence e.g. with non-LDS and Menet)

(9) Satan

B.THE DISEMBODIED REALM

(10) The spirit bodies

(11) Vibration and energy

(12) Space time and speed of travel

(13) Receiving knowledge / realizing oneness/omniscience. Web of connection

(14) Telepathic Communication telepathy

(15) Knowing the thoughts and feelings of other beings and forms of life. Mind Reading

C.MEETINGS WITH THE DIVINE

(16) The Light of God, Heavenly Father,

(17) Meeting Jesus

(18) Holy Ghost/Holy Spirit (no Trinity…three separate Godhead figures)

(19) Heavenly Mother

(20) Mary Mother of Jesus

(21) Meeting Prophets

(22) Angels -- Angelic ancestors.

D.FAMILY MEETINGS

(23) Greeted by friends and family. Family is very important in LDS culture.

(24) Seeing dead relatives and friends - including those not known to be dead

(25) Age and physical wellbeing of family Everyone is young and healthy

(26) C Life review Arriving home. Self-judging

(27) Premortal Life and returning home.

(28) View of the past premortal life

(29) View of the past – immersion in history since creation onwards - historical review.

Meeting historical figures

E. CHILDREN IN THE SPIRIT WORLD, BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER EARTHLY BIRTH.

(30) Children and NDEs

(31) Children who die in infancy and under the age of eight.

(32) Miscarriages and aborted children

(33) Visions of the unborn before birth on Earth

F. PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF THE SPIRIT WORLD

(34) Realness of the perceived experience and perceived realm

(35) Where is it?

(36) Beauty of the Spirit World

(37) Ineffability – inadequacy of our five senses

2. Natural aspects of the Spirit World

(38) Music

(39) Colors and heightened senses

(40) Animals

(41) Plants, trees and flowers in the Spirit World

(42) Planets

URBAN AREAS OF THE SPIRIT WORLD

(43) Cities and buildings

(44) Temples

(45) Celestial City

(46) Library

(47) Genealogical work in library

(47b) Link between genealogy work on both side of the Veil

(48) Technology

OTHER AREAS OF THE REALMS

(49) Dark places/ Spirit Prison – Missionary work

(50) Hierarchy in the Spirit World and heavens

PROGRESSION

(51) Moral and spiritual hierarchy is mirrored in the afterlife in different leaves and realms that match the level of the inhabitants.

(52) Goal of apotheosis and progression

(53) Non-Mormons in Spirit World

G. SOCIETY IN THE SPIRIT WORLD - FAMILY & SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE SPIRIT WORLD

(54) White robes (as in Temple)

(55) Food

(56) Relatives in Spirit World concern for us on Earth and do work for us

Relatives in the Spirit World ask for genealogical and ordinance work to be done for them on Earth by returning persons.

(57) Prayer

(58) Business and industry in the Spirit World Busyness - Hurry to do work before the second coming and to complete ordinances

Influence of the departed on the living through the Veil

(59) Knowledge gained from the visit to the Spirit World / We all have a life plan/ progression

(60) Experiencer and other spirits able to see family on Earth from the Spirit World

H. RETURNING

(61) Returning

(62) Being sent back choice agency

(63) Choice to return to the body agency

(64) Return party or goodbye ceremony

(65) Reluctance to return

(66) power of prayer and priesthood blessings to call back the dead to life

(67) Experience of returning to body

(68) Pain ceases when spirit leaves the body and returns when spirit returns.

b) Experience of returning to body a) pain b) squeezing in c) disgust

(69) Miraculous healings. It's not your time

(70) Border Limit - to going further and point beyond which there is no return.

REASONS TO RETURN

(71) To do service be of help, support family and children on Earth.

(72) Mission on Earth. "Go back! It's not your time!" Life Plan

THE FUTURE

(73) Apocalyptic visions / View of the future

(Richardson, Rowe, Menet, Durham, Daybell, Fenimore, 'Spencer')

Personal future

National and World Future

I. AFTER THE VTE: TRANSFORMATION

(74) Verification/ veridical event

(75) Gifts and dreams/no Veil

(76) Lost fear of death expressed

(77) Joining or leaving the Church.

(78) Impression of the spirit to share VTE

(79) Memory of the VTE remains clear, vibrant, and influential.

(80) Consistency of stories over time

Appendix 3

Data and Theological Commentary Presented in the Order of Eighty Elements of a VTE, with Examples and References

Sections

A The journey

B The disembodied realm

C Meetings

D Life review

E Children in the Spirit World

F Physical aspects of the Spirit World,

G Society in the Spirit World

H. Returning

I After the VTE

A. THE JOURNEY

(1) The Veil

The Veil is a common motif in LDS Theology and a critical part of Mormon cosmology as it functions as a border between the Earth life and the Spirit World. Its main function is to preserve freedom and autonomy on Earth. When a spirit comes to Earth its memory of the premortal world is erased and amnesia instituted (Betty Eadie 1viii). If humans retained full memory of their pre-Earthly state and if full communication was commonplace across the Veil, it might erase the ability to make free choices and interfere with spiritual growth. It would lead to

complications in ethical decisions such as the choosing of good over evil and in choosing freely given service to others. It would also challenge faith as a free choice.

Two Veil motifs can be found in Mormon views, one is the idea that the Earthly body itself is the Veil. Another idea is that the Veil is a sort of curtain, as is represented by a large cloth curtain that symbolically divides sacred space in Mormon Temples (David Brookes 1ix). It is also a curtain-like barrier between the earthly and spiritual realms. The theme of the Veil has undergone some fluidity, as is natural in an evolving tradition. In the 19th century the body was seen as the Veil rather than an invisible curtain, which is represented physically in the Temples. This makes sense because it is the body and the falling away of the body at death that permits free contact between the worlds, so the flesh is a type of Veil.

This Veil can be crossed both ways (Chad Daybell 1xi). In a VTE a person might see the other side of the Veil and indeed prayers can cross it too. In the other direction angels, ancestral guides, spiritual beings, The Holy Ghost, and revelation can cross from the Spirit World to here, appearing whether in visions, dreams of promptings (See Mr. Woods 1iv). It is a common theme in the community that the other side controls what we are allowed to remember after a VTE. Some information and memories are wiped, and forgetfulness is reimposed (see Tooley 1vii and Eadie 1viii).[1]

I found seventeen reports of the Veil, in the VTEs I examined beginning with the VTE of Lovisa Mack Tuttle in 1784 who described it as being as thick as a spider's web when she saw Jesus through it in the Spirit World. (1i). Loise Goates, 1890 talks of a Veil being lifted (1ii).

[1] This is linked to the idea that at the time of our birth our memories of our premortal lives are suppressed. See Premortality, a Glorious Reality October 1985 by Elder Neal A. Maxwell. He talks about our agreement at birth to enter into a sort of "anesthetic of forgetfulness." By Elder Neal A. Maxwell, "Premortality, a Glorious Reality," October 2, 1985, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1985/10/premortality-a-glorious-reality?lang=eng.

Mary Hales, 1925, just mentions the common phrase "on the other side of the Veil" referring to it as a sort of boundary. Julie Rowe 2004 repeats this idea of 'beyond the Veil'(1iii,1xv). Russell Ricks, Lance Richardson, and Sarah Menet, 1979, both describe the Veil as being very thin. (Russell Ricks 1vi, Lance Richardson 1xiv, and Sarah Menet 1x). Chad Daybell, 1985/93, describes ancestors watching us through the Veil (1xi), whilst Kim Rives in her VTE saw her Earth family through the Veil but reported that they could not sense her there (1xii). Ralph Jensen describes intervention through the Veil, and the knowledge that his deceased wife reached through it to help her family. Like many of the others, he describes the entry into the Spirit World realm as 'passing thought the Veil.' (1xiv).

Theology

It could be argued that the Mormon experiencers here were simply using the term 'Veil' to describe their experience, because it was a term, they were familiar with from their theological background. The Veil is a very common idea in Mormon Theology. Not all elements could have been so easily anticipated, however. One might argue that some had read or heard about the Spirit World before their experience and that these ideas influenced their experience. While this might be true, there are other experiences such as autoscopy and out of body experiences which were not as expected nor as easily predicted in common knowledge. What is remarkable and what challenges the assumption that the brain produces and is responsible for consciousness are the descriptions of the disembodied spirit having not just awareness but perfect and superhuman consciousness. This element is constant throughout two hundred years of experiences.

Jeff O'Driscoll mentions the idea of the Temple Veil in Holy of Holies, in the Hebrew Bible and then the New Testament idea of Christ' Flesh representing the Veil. [2]He interprets the

[2] O'Driscoll, *Not Yet,* 58.

Veil as the physical body, which is our mortal tabernacle which hinders full communication with the divine. [3] He describes how we become en-Veiled at birth." we picked up a portion of the Veil as we passed through it at birth. It enveloped us and caused us to forget our divine heritage." [4] On the other hand, he sees this body Veil as a form of protection which aids spiritual growth on Earth by guaranteeing our amnesia of the preexistence. As with Christ, when we leave our bodies in spirit form the Veil is rent and knowledge returns. [5] O 'Driscoll believes that spiritual receptiveness is hindered by the 'Veil of flesh', and he explains, "In my analogy, mortality falls between the curtains of our mortal bodies. On our left is birth on our right is death; We set aside a portion of our glory to be here, to learn and experience and grow. The light and glory spills into this realm as souls pass through the Veil." [6]

There is a strong relationship between the two realms and those on both side of the Veil work together for the same ends.

The idea of the Veil also explains why not everyone who has a near-death event remembers a VTE. Only a fraction of those who are near death and recover remember their experience. While there is no explanation of this to explain why some rather than others have it, one suggestion could be that when recrossing the Veil on the way back the memory is wiped, much as it is at birth, and amnesia about the Spirit World is established by the 'other side' on the human involved. The theme of forgetting the preexistence Spirit World, in order to maintain free

[3] O'Driscoll, *Not Yet,*72.
[4] O'Driscoll, *Not Yet,* 60.
[5] O'Driscoll, *Not Yet,* 89-91.
[6] O'Driscoll, *Not Yet,* 8-9.

will is a common theme.[7] Remembering too much from a VTE would also affect agency. It could be argued that the 'other side' controls the amount of memories retained.

Elder Alvin R. Dyer wrote: "There is a Veil between the one sphere and the other which renders the spiritual sphere invisible to the temporal. To discern beings or things in the Spirit World, a person in the flesh must be quickened by spiritual element; the Veil must be drawn, or the organs of sight, or of hearing, must be transformed, so as to be adapted to the spiritual sphere." [8]

Within the context of the endowment the Temple Veil is symbolically connected with the embroidered undergarment. Both the Veil and the markings contain similar ritual markings, suggesting that our physical bodies constitute the Veil or boundary which separates us from the spiritual realms. This to be lifted out of the body is to be lifted beyond the Veil into the spiritual world."[9]

(2) Out of body/autoscopy

The phenomenon of coming out of the body and looking down at the body from above (autoscopy) is one of the most predominant and foundational elements of a VTE. It has many theological, philosophical, and scientific implications. There were fifty-two descriptions of being out of the body in the VTE data. Experiencers felt their spirit coming out of the body and later on, felt it returning to the body. (see Elements 67 and 68). Whilst out of the body full volition remains, and ordinary thinking continues. Lorenzo Dow Young 1826 felt conscious, natural and

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[7] Terryl Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought : Cosmos, God, Humanity* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 45.

[8] Alvin R. Dyer, *Who Am I?* (Deseret Book, 1963), 501-2.

[9] Margaret Merrill Toscano, and Paul Toscano, *Strangers in paradox: Explorations in Mormon Theology* (Signature Books, 1990), 237.

with complete sensations out of his body (2i). Straightforward autoscopy is described frequently Heroine Randall 1830 (2ii), A Woman (2v), Jacob Hamblin 1858 (2vi), Dr. Wiltse (2xiv), Albert M. Boyce (2xii), Bertha Deusnup Elder 1913 (2xx), Henry Moroni Zollinger 1920(2xxi), Denise Mendenhall (2xlvii), Suzanne Freeman (2xlvi), Sellesa Hurd Snarr (2xxxiv), Robert Aimes 1945 (2xxvii), Lance Richardson (2xlviii), Julie Rowe (2xlix), Mark Pedersen (2li), Jane Moe (2lii), Lucy Pearl Leavitt Randall 1921 (2xxiii).

Many felt themselves rising up and able to look down on their body and people in the room and can observe their actions e.g., weeping relatives around the bed below. Heroine Randall (2ii), Joseph Eldridge (2iii), Phoebe Woodruff 1838 (2iv), Mr. Bertrand (2xii), William D. Huntington (2x), Ella Jensen (2xiii), Harriet Ovard Lee 1901 (2xix), Larry Tooley (2xxxvi).

Some witness others rescuing or trying to heal their body and sometimes they are able to verify this afterwards. Brigham Smoot 1889 (2viii) Louise Goates 1890 (2ix), Victoria Clayton McCune (2xvi), Frederick Babble 1920 (2xxii), Herman Stulz 1921 (2xxiv), Jeff Olsen (2xliii), Sarah L. Menet (2xxxix), Elane Durham (2xxxviii), and Brother Carl DeHaven 1956 (2xxviii). Even a child has a vivid memory of events such as Brian Glenn 1993 (2xxxv), who was pinned down by a garage door. “Joan’s aunt” (2xxxiii) saw efforts to save her in the hospital from above.

Some take a while to recognize their own body, which is consistent with the nearly ‘dead’ not realizing they are almost dead. In many cases the body seems foreign and even gross. However full awareness and perception remains, and heightened senses are experienced. Mr. Bertrand (2xv), Peter E. Johnson (2xviii), Victoria Clayton McCune (2xi) and Betty Eadie (2xxxvii). Ranelle Wallace hardly recognized her badly burned body (2xli).

Many report the cessation of pain when the spirit leaves the body George Washington Brimhall (2xvii), Walter P. Monson 1923 (2xxv), Scott Drummond (xl2), Some add a sense of calmness that comes with the release from pain Kim Rives (2xliv).

One of the most dramatic veridical OBEs is that of Thos S. Thomas in 1894, when he traveled all over the USA and the world and was able to verify what he had seen his family do and say after his return (2xvi). Some describe flying like a bird like Edna Coray Dyer 1924 (2xxvi).

Sometimes noise is heard upon leaving the body. Angie Fenimore (2xlv) heard a distinct humming. Other report coming out in a 'pop' such as Chad Daybell (2xli), Betty Eadie heard buzzing (2xxxvii). Sounds are also reported in Tibetan NDEs.

Many recall conversations held about them when they are presumed 'dead'. Ralph Jensen (2l), Marriner Wood Merrill (2xxix).

Cartesian Dualism Ghost in the Machine- LDS slightly different in that some sort of body is always required.) Implications for consciousness and where its root origin is to be found in the cosmos.

When the spirit is outside of the body it feels no pain, worldly cares fade away. Telepathic communication, mind reading, the ability to go through solid objects and travel instantly anywhere at will as some of the parapsychological phenomena described in these accounts. While the spirit can observe the living, the living cannot see or hear the spirit being.

Theology

On Earth there is a body and spirit, in the interim Spirit World the spirit is without the restored resurrected body. It has a temporary form, but the process is not complete. Throughout the history of Christianity, and into the modern scientific era, the definition of bodies has

changed and there are many variations on how to understand the body and mind or in religious doctrines the mind and soul or spirit also. Typically, science acknowledges only the body and explains mind as an epiphenomenon of the brain. It denies that there is an independent, 'ghost in the machine' spirit. Most Christian denominations accept the existence of a spirit or soul. Popular opinion tends to assume it is an ethereal misty shadow form and defer from a full definition of form, and others think in terms of a mental afterlife and heavenly realm. Mainline churches that adhere to the Creeds, teach the resurrection of the physical body, and leave the nature of heaven mostly to the imagination. Some congregants to not understand these implications and confusion exists between the priesthood and laity on these finer points. Mormons however have a clear and well-defined doctrine of the physicality of the spirit. Church leaders have given pronouncements about the nature of the body and its relationship to spirit. It is not a typical modern Christian dualistic understanding, and it teaches full physicality of the spirit, and of heavenly entities, including a physically anthropomorphic God and son.[10] Only the Holy Ghost is disembodied. [11]

Joseph Smith said:

> Each of us has a spirit body and a physical body. Before coming to this Earth, we were personages of spirit, *yet we were individuals. We could walk, run, speak, see, I [and] think.* Our spirit body was made of elements not found in mortality. That spirit body, combined with our mortal body, makes a living soul.[12]

Brigham Young said,

> Our bodies are composed of visible tangible matter . . . What is commonly called death does not destroy the body, it only causes a separation of spirit and body, but the principle of life, inherent in the native elements, of which the body is composed, still continues.[13]

Joseph F. Smith taught that:

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[10] Brigham Young, Journal of Discourses, 11:122.
[11] There is no Trinity in Mormon doctrine. Father, Son and Holy Ghost are separate entities.
[12] Eldred G. Smith, in Conference Report, April 5, 1963, 18; See also Ibid., October 2, 1964. 10.
[13] Discourses of Brigham Young, compiled by John A. Widstoe, (Deseret Book Co., 1954), 368-369.

> While we are in mortality we are clogged, and we see
> as through a glass darkly, we see only in part, and it is difficult
> for us to comprehend the smallest things with which
> we are associated. But when we put on immortality, our condition
> will be very different, for we ascend into an enlarged
> sphere; although we shall not become perfect immediately
> after our departure from the body, for the spirit without
> the body is not perfect, and the body without the spirit is
> dead. The disembodied spirit during the interval of the
> death of the body and its resurrection from the grave is
> not perfect, hence it is not prepared to enter into the exaltation
> of the celestial kingdom; but it has the privilege
> of soaring in the midst of immortal beings, and of enjoying,
> to a certain extent, the presence of God,[14]

There is a physical likeness between our body on both side of the Veil. "That which is spiritual [is] in the likeness of that which is temporal; and that which is temporal in the likeness of that which is spiritual." and "The spirit of man in the likeness of his person."[15] This means that both sides of the Veil, including our bodies are physical and similar.

A common analogy is the 'hand and glove' to represent 'spirit and body' and their separation at death. President Boyd K. Packer explained how the physical body is the tabernacle for the immortal spirit by comparing it to a glove and the spirit to a hand. The glove covers the hand, but the hand is the real living part. Death is like taking off the glove.[16]

O'Driscoll has the gift of seeing the spirits of the newly deceased in the hospital where he worked, in a shared death experience, a form of VTE. He met and saw Tamara, the deceased wife of Jeff Olsen floating over her husband in the ER, and they shared emotions about the accident.[17] He has seen souls come and go and hover in between, seen them stand in front of him

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[14] Joseph F. Smith, Gospel Doctrines (Deseret Book Co.,1919), 554. At the resurrection the body is restored perfectly. Alma 11:44–45; D&C 88:15-16.

[15] D&C 29:31–32; Joseph Smith, editorial, *Times and Seasons*, April 1, 1842, 745.

[16] Boyd K. Packer, *Teach Ye Diligently* (Deseret Book, 2008), 230–37.

[17] O'Driscoll, *Not Yet,* ii, 4.

in communication, and even received messages from the recently dead in his job as a physician.[18]

There are many scriptural descriptions of the nature of spirits e.g. Ether 3:16 and Alma 34:34 in the Book of Mormon.

(3) Indifference towards the body

Experiencers are so enthralled and ecstatic upon leaving the body in spirit form that the body is soon forgotten. If it is seen it is observed as if it is something detached, foreign and not of the 'real' essence of the self that remains aware. It is not regarded as something beautiful but rather something heavy and dense, and full of pain. Professor Hudson's mother likened her body to an old coat that she had shed. Like many others, she had little inclination to return to the body. (3i) This idea feeds into the freedom and release that is felt by those in spirit form. Elane Durham, upon seeing her body on the hospital gurney felt indifference towards it. (3ii) Jeff Olsen didn't even recognize his 'wrecked' body and felt pitiful towards the broken heap, that he felt no connection to (3iii).

Theology

These experiences challenge ideas about the relationship between body and soul as it is typically understood in Christianity. The Mormon afterlife is typically understood as being embodied in some sort of physical form, which is more perfected. It is expected that the bodies of the dead will be resurrected at the end times and for this reason burial is preferred to cremation.[19]

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[18] O'Driscoll, *Not Yet,* 9, 26-7
[19] Alma, 11:42–45

Lastly, while other forms of Christianity look down upon the fallen moral state of the body, Mormon doctrine upholds the dignity and holiness of the body. Terryl Givens notes that embodiment is not a degradation, for God himself has a body like ours, and the highest glory is when we are reunited with our bodies.[20]

(4) Tunnel/ Journey /Door – can be experienced both coming and going

The idea of a tunnel has been emphasized since the publication of Raymond Moody's books and thirteen experiencers reported something akin in my data and many of them came from decades before he labelled the experience. Marba Peck Hale had an almost contemporary experience in1878, as she felt drawn into a 'whirlpool-like tunnel' and then saw a bright light. Flora Ann Mayer circa 1900, also described a 'whirlpool-like tunnel' (4i) whereas Ella Jensen 1891, 'entered a large hall, similar to a tunnel.' (4ii) Hugh Nibley 1933, recalls getting sucked own a tube like a tunnel as did Ranelle Wallace, (4iv) & (4viii) Russell Ricks just felt spinning as he rose up (4v) whereas Betty Eadie felt drawn up into a tornado at an incredible speed. (4vi) Jane Moe felt sucked up by a vacuum. (4xii) Angie Fenimore was sucked up in a 'whoosh'. (4x) Chad Daybell and Mark Pedersen both experienced a tunnel of light, whereas Kim Rives tunnel was warm and cozy. (4vii) (4ciii), & (4ix). Not everyone had this experience, Jane Moe experienced a common element, a door as the portal instead (xi).

Theology

A tunnel or door is a common theme and is part of the journey between the realms when going or returning. Some experience no tunnel or journey but just find themselves in a dark void,

[20] Terryl Givens, *Wrestling the Angel: The Foundations of Mormon Thought : Cosmos, God, Humanity* (Oxford University Press, 2014), 45.

(Fenimore) or in nature or a garden. [21]Movement is perceived and appears to be automatically controlled.

Amy Call described being sucked out from the top of her head. This relates to Vajrayana ideas of the spirit leaving the crown of the head. While the spirit can leave the body from various places, usually orifices, according to Tibetan beliefs, the best place is through the opening at the top back of the skull. This is why the body is not allowed to be touched in Tibetan culture for a few days until the spirit has left. Only the top of the head can be touched to encourage the exit there. Chad Daybell also felt his spirit pop out of his head.

(5) Guides and escorts for the dying and deathbed visitors

The idea of a journey to the afterlife is recorded by the Greeks and Egyptians, so it is not surprising that guides to accompany the spirit are encountered, and in Mormon experiences these guides are either angels or deceased loved ones. Many theologies classify angels as a species different from dead humans, however in Mormon Theology dead ancestors can function as angels.

With thirty-five instances of guides described this is one of the most common elements. Sometimes guides are known, and deceased relatives surround the dying person but sometimes guides are not known. In my data over twenty had unknown guides, and ten had family guides, two described angels and one saw Jesus. The guides were often dressed in white, were friendly and often exuded light and brought a sense of calmness with them. They would simply ask the dying person to come with them. Only Pedersen reported not seeing a guide. (5xxxiv). These

[21] Angie Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness: My Near-Death Journey to the Edge of Hell* (Bantam Books, 1995), 92.

guides often stay with the experiencer throughout the whole experience and some even give tours of the Spirit World.

Lorenzo Dow Young's guide is unknown and tells him to go with him. (5i) John Peterson's guide asked him if he was ready to go (5iv). Heroine Randall describes a 'personage of beauty' (5ii). Harriet Lee, 1860, heard a voice calling her by name, then she followed this 'personage' (5v).

Meeting a deceased loved one is a common type of report. In the Mormon context it reinforced the ideal of 'family forever' and the belief in eternal family bonds. Harriet Beal's dead mother come to fetch her in 1852. She saw her clearly but no one around her bed from the living saw anything (5iv). Eliza Ursenbach, 1872, was led away by her father and then her husband. (5vii). Loise Goates 1890 was met by her mother-in-law. (5x) Lance Richardson was met by an old friend (5xxx).

Peter E. Johnson 1989 described a guardian angel following him to Earth and there to escort him (5ix). Ralph Jensen's visitor took his worry away and brought him comfort, peace, and love (5333ii). Betty Eadie was accompanied by three men who explained they had been with her for all eternity (5xxiv).

Theology

Lundahl writes about the role of angelic guides in the journey and says that they have three roles as guides, messengers or escorts." Angels are personages with whom the NDEr does not usually recall having previous acquaintance. Angels serve as guides, messengers or escorts in the NDE."[22] It is commonly thought that ancestors are given angelic duties to guides so that the

[22] Craig R. Lundahl, "Angels in Near-Death Experiences." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 1 (1992): 49.

idea of angels as a distinct species of entity is confused in everyday parlance. Technically angels are non-human entities however they can be translated humans or resurrected beings.[23]

O'Driscoll says that "Spirit guides, guardian angels and other messengers may draw back the Veil and help us remember."[24]

Angels can belong to various subgroups, but Angels and the Spirit of Just Men make up the beings in the Spirit World.[25] If one meets a spirit one should ask to shake its hand. "If he be an angel he will do so, and you will feel his hand."[2627] A fallen angel is not physical and will not offer the hand, but an angel is made of flesh and bone and has a hand to shake.[28]

Angels have no wings.[29]

(6) White light full of love/ light/ peace joy bliss

Light, white light and white clothing is a huge theme in the VTE data. It is not just an Earthly light but seems to emit loving kindness and it is very attractive. Thirty or more VTEs describe this in various ways. Instead of feeling afraid, experiencers felt deeply loved and at peace. Clayne Wayman awakened to eternal love (6xxiii) and Ralph Jensen felt the infinite love penetrate every fiber of his being (6cciv). Lance Richardson felt peace permeate every fiber of his being (6xxii). Jane Moe talks about being engulfed in intense love (6xiv). Jeff Olsen met a

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[23] Donald W. Parry, *Angels: Agents of Light, Love, and Power* (Utah: Deseret Book, 2013). Joseph Smith, *History of the Church*, 6:51–52. Jeffrey R. Holland, "The Ministry of Angels," *Ensign*, Oct. 2008.—Brigham Young, *Discourses of Brigham Young*, 41–42. Wilford Woodruff. *Journal*, Feb. 13, 1848. Heber Kimball, *Journal of Discourses*, 3:230. & Whitney, *Life of Heber C. Kimball*, 461. John A Widtsoe, *Rational Theology*, 68.

[24] O'Driscoll, *Not Yet,* 91-92.

[25] Dana, *Prophetic Teachings,* 95. He says that some angels are spirits not yet born on Earth, some are persons who have lived on Earth but are not yet resurrected, some are the spirits of just men or women made perfect and some are translated beings. See D&C 129:1-3.

[26] D&C 129:4-7, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/129?lang=eng.

[27] D&C 129:4-7, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/129?lang=eng.

[28] D&C 129:1-3.

[29] "Section 129, Keys for Determining if Administrations Are From God," January 1, 2002, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/doctrine-and-covenants-student-manual/section-129-keys-for-determining-if-administrations-are-from-god?lang=eng.

bright light energized with pure unconditional love. It is often understood that this light comes from a divine source and is connected to Heavenly Father. Ranelle Wallace knew this love came from God (6xviii). The light spoke to Elane Durham and then Jesus walked out of the light (6xii). A voice also came out of the light and spoke to Lawrence Tooley, and he saw facial features in the light (6x).

Comment

Unlike generic NDEs, being or beings of light are not equated with the divine in the Mormon VTEs and there is a reluctance to suggest divinity to such entities of light. Heavenly Father and Jesus emit a light, but they are flesh and blood beings. [30]Instead, both Top and Lundahl interpret beings of light as angelic or ancestral beings. Lundahl writes that Michelle Sorensen and David Willmore interviewed many latter-day Saints and found that the group generally describe the 'being of light as a deceased family member.' [31] They say that this being is a guide.[32] Lundahl clarifies that the beings of light are either deceased family members or angels.

In Alma it is written, "The spirits of those who are righteous are received into a state of happiness, which is called paradise, a state of rest; a state of peace, where they shall rest from' all their troubles and. from all care, anti-sorrow."[33]

(7) Blackness/ the void

The void and darkness are not necessarily a negative polar opposite to the light. It is often just a place to rest, recuperate and adjust. Only six VTEs described it. Ranelle Wallace passed through the void before seeing many lights. (7v) Angie Fenimore, who attempted suicide,

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[30] D&C 130:22.

[31] Craig R. Lundahl, "Angels in Near-Death Experiences." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 1 (1992): 52.

[32] Lundahl, *Angels in Near-Death Experiences*, 52.

[33] Alma, 40:12 Also see 1 Nephi 15:28–30.

intuitively understood it as a place of 'spiritual time out'. Jennie Schnakenberg 1896 passed though darkness before coming to a beautiful world. (7i)

(8) Place of despair (Protestant influence e.g. with non-LDS and Sarah Menet)

Only nine VTE's described a place of despair. As in the general generic NDE type, negative experiences are rare and often transitory. Sarah Menet visited a black place, and she understood it as a place where bad actions lead a soul to go, rather than a place of punishment where a soul is sent. (8v) This reminds me more of a place of bad karma, than a true 'hell'. Mormon Theology has a 'Spirit Prison and a notion of self-imposed exile in outer darkness but the medieval idea of hell and purgatory is absent.[34] Elane Durham observed Earth bound spirits whose position was self-imposed. (8iv) This resonates with the LDS idea of personal agency and choice, which operates in the spirit realms also. Charles Woodbury saw people in dark clothing living in strife, but he knew it was a temporary state (8vi). Angie Fenimore sensed evil in a foggy dark place of solitude but soon a loving voice asked her if this was her choice and then this light rescued her (8vii). Only Mark Pedersen had a detailed experience of more evil realms where the callous and greedy resided (8ix).

Comment

Any hellish realm is of limited duration.[35] Alma talks about paradise and utter darkness, but these are states not places.[36]

Orson Pratt wrote:

> Those in [Spirit] Prison are in an intermediate state: they are not saved, neither are they irrecoverably lost: *but when the gospel is preached to them it will decide their fate,*

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[34] 1 Peter 3:18–20

[35] Givens, *When Souls had Wings,* 245, ; For the Redemption of the Dead and preaching to those in spirit prison see D&C 138:30; Dana, *Prophetic Teachings,* 84.

[36] Givens, *When Souls had Wings,* 247; and Alma 40:12-14.

redeeming those who receive it, and damning those who reject it; the one rising to light, glory, and happiness-and the other falling to darkness, damnation; and misery. [37]

Elder Orson E Whitney wrote: “There are two classes of beings in the Spirit World ... Good and bad spirits inhabit that realm. *Light and darkness divide it,* and each domain. has its appropriate population.” [38]

Righteous spirits can visit those in Spirit Prison and preach to them there.[39] The dead have agency to be redeemed.[40]

There is agency on Earth and in the Spirit World, to make choices and there is no compulsion to accept the Gospel. Therefore, in the Spirit World there are all kinds of people, both good and bad. President George Q Cannon explained:

> *There will be as many differences between the spirits in the Spirit World as there are differences today in spirits that are upon the Earth - some who are worthy of celestial glory; some who are worthy of the terrestrial glory, ·and some who are only worthy of the telestial glory, of which the stars are a similitude. There is this. difference in, the human family, and this arises from the fact that we all have our agency.*[41]

Elder Alvin R. Dyer "The spirit world will contain the same cross-section of diversity of race and. creed that exist upon the Earth. The spirit will awaken there with the same religious concept, or the lack of it.”[42]

In the Pearl of Great Price, the Lord told Enoch mentioned *"a prison… prepared"* for the *"wicked."* [43]

Elder Bruce R. McConkie wrote:

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[37] Orson Pratt, "Questions and Answers on Doctrine," *The Seer,* Washington, DC edition, January 1894, Vol. II, No. 1, 208.

[38] Orson F. Whitney, *The Millennial* Star, January 26, 1922, 84:57.

[39] D&C 138:30-37.

[40] D&C 138:18, 30, 58-59.

[41] George Q Cannon, *The Millennial Star,* May 10, 1891, 53:580.

[42] Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, 597.-- Also Dyer, Who Am I? 490-91.

[43] Moses, 7:38, 43.

Since disembodied spirits cannot gain a fulness of joy until their resurrection, they consider their habitation in the Spirit World as one of imprisonment, and so the whole Spirit World (including both paradise and hell) is a Spirit Prison*;* It was to the *righteous spirits in prison,* those who were in paradise, · that our Lord preached while his body was in the tomb"[44]

Russell M. Nelson[45] explains that apart from physical death there is spiritual death, which is a self-chosen state of denying God and Jesus. I think that this is like the separation seen in 'hell' or Spirit Prison.[46] Thus, one can be very much alive physically but dead spiritually. Repentance is always possible because there is always room for progress.

(9) Satan

Despite the theology of Satan common in Christianity and Mormonism, no-one met Satan, and he appears absent and powerless in the afterlife realms. However various experiencers report learning about or even witnessing a replay of the Fall of Satan and his angels from heaven as a replay of the Plan of Salvation. Both Freeman and Mendenhall (9i) & (9ii) discuss the power of evil and Jensen and Pedersen allude to them, but with little or no contact. (9iii) & (9iv). It can be argued that their general beliefs on the power of Satan on Earth to influence or even possess humans, may have come to pass with the recent criminal behavior of Chad Daybell.

Satan or Lucifer is a fallen angel who on Earth can lead people astray.[47] That great spiritual personage was an angel of God in his "first estate,"· and yet never had a body of flesh,

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[44] 1 Peter 3:18-21;4:6; D&C 76:73-74. Bruce R. McConkie, *Mormon Doctrine,* 2nd ed. (Bookcraft, 1966), 755. – Also, D&C 93:33-34.

[45]Elder Russell M. Nelson "The Doors of Death." April 1992. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1992/04/doors-of-death?lang=eng.

[46] (See 2 Ne. 9:12; Alma 12:16; Alma 42:9; Hel. 14:16, 18.) It "is defined as a state of spiritual alienation from God." (Joseph Fielding Smith, *Doctrines of Salvation,* comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols., (Bookcraft, 1954–56, 2:217.)

[47] Visions of Moses, 1:12-22; D&C 128:20.

but "was in authority in the presence of God" as a spirit, before he rebelled and was "'thrust down." [48]

Comment

Satan will only be bound at the millennium. He cannot affect the just in the Spirit World. Many VTEs witness his fall from heaven.[49]

B THE DISEMBODIED REALM

(10A) Many experiencers give positive descriptions of the afterlife and explain how it differs from Earth. It is a place of pleasant emotions, calm and peacefulness. (Hale 10iii, Peck 10i) It is a place with many subdivisions.[50]

(10B) The spirit bodies

There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes,'! and "Intelligence was not created or made, neither indeed can be." Joseph Smith: D&C 93:29-30 The Doctrine and Covenants."[51]

Most humans are unable to see the spirit bodies of those out of body. Pedersen for example reports that he tried to communicate with a nurse in the hospital by touching and talking to her, but she was unaware.[52]

At some time after the initial journey to the Spirit World, our experiences realize they are not disembodied but have another type of humanoid body. Thos. S. Thomas says he received his eternal body. (10v) Hannah Savage 1900 beheld that the spirits in the afterlife were real and

[48] D&C 76:25-28.
[49] See D&C 29:22–29; 88:17–20, 110–15.
[50] Dana, *Prophetic Teachings,* 80.
[51] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 54.
[52] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 79.

composed of fine matter. (10vi) This reminds me of the LDS doctrine that spirits are composed of fine matter.

One of the best reviews was described by Herman Stulz in 1921 emphasizes physicality there.

I felt like I was never sick at all and filled with a glow of health I never felt before in my life. But I wanted to make sure whether this was only a dream and to make sure I began to move my legs, my arms, and fingers, I grabbed my hair, pulled my ears and began to walk around the room, and everything functioned like it did in mortality. I thought, this must be death feared by all men, it was a feeling of ecstasy I felt so light like a newborn man all my limbs worked with ease almost to perfection (10viii).

The physicality of the Mormon Spirit World is most striking, especially from the perspective of modern believers in 'heaven' who imagine it as something ethereal and mysterious. The Mormon afterlife is extraordinarily ordinary, if not perfused with love and goodness and divine purpose. It is almost a mirror image of Earth without the negatives, evil and suffering. Bodies are required, and this avoids the philosophical conundrum of imagining a disembodied body. It is quite a different experience from the mystical '*fana*' and absorption into the apophatic 'Oneness of everything'. Bodies are young, fit, clothed and organized into a hierarchical society.

Hugh Nibley describes feeling as light as a feather and in possession of all his faculties, which were tremendous (10ix). NDErs often report expanded qualities of perception. According to Heber Hale the eyes of many enjoyed unrestricted vision and unimpeded action (10vii). Mark

Pederson writes ""As I looked at myself, not my body self but my spirit self I noticed that my hands looked like my hands and my feet looked like my feet. I was wearing clothing." [53] (10xiii).

Theology

> Man is a dual being. He is spiritual and he is physical.
> The latter is dependent upon the former for intelligence
> and life. The body without the spirit is dead, but the
> spirit is an immortal and an ^independent principle and being.
> It is the more important part, yet man bestows more
> thought and labor upon the body, as a rule, than upon the
> better part.[54] (Joseph F. Smith)

(11) Vibration and energy

Four VTEs describe frequency and vibration, which are concepts used in modern spiritual circles and by those who try to incorporate New Physics to explain otherworldly experiences. Olsen feels the familiar vibration of his dead wide Tamara, and Amy Call remembers her own vibration change as she entered the Spirit World (11ii) & (11iv).

(12) Space time and speed of travel

Again, referring to New Physics and theories of possible altered space and time in other dimensions, our VTEs reflect these anomalies. Almost twenty VTEs describe instantaneous and speedy travel anywhere, and an altered space/time environment. Diverging from an Earthly perspective in linear time from birth to death, on the other side it is all 'now' and in eternity. Beal and Lee describe floating in the air rather than walking, (12i) & (12ii), and Archie Graham

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[53] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 78.
[54] Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine,* 337.

says he is flying (vi). Wallace flew (11ix) and Tooley both levitates and flies (11vii). Tibetans also report 'magical' *siddhi* levitation and flight.

Thomas says time differs (11v), Purvis says he had no concept of time (11x), and Wallace says time does not exist (11viii). Elane Durham travels at the speed of thought (11viii). Gibson says he just had to think of a place to go and he was instantly there. Apotheosis is part of Mormon doctrine, and it seems like the spirits have some divine qualities in the Spirit World. Instantaneous movement, and access to knowledge as we shall see next, is akin to omniscience. This omniscience occurs when experiencers see flashbacks of all recorded history, since they are in a place where time is suspended (Rowe 11xv) and (Jensen 11xiv). Jense sees everything since creation, millions of years, during twelve minutes of Earth time. Freeman experienced a tour of Old Nauvoo Salt Lake City as it was over a hundred years ago and interacted with historical Mormon figures there (11xvi). Thos. S. Thomas says that 'time is figured on a different basis than in Earthly life."[55]

Brent Top discusses timelessness in VTEs, and quotes Carl Jung when he discussed his own NDE: "I can describe the experience as only ecstasy of a contemporal state in which present past and future are one.[56] He also discusses Swedenborg's similar ideas on timelessness and how these ideas informed early Mormons.[57] Whatever this other invisible dimension is, it appears to be outside space and time.

Theology

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[55] Thomas, *Glimpse of the Future,* 59.

[56] Brent L. Top, and Wendy C Top. *Beyond Death's Door: Understanding Near-Death Experiences in Light of the Restored Gospel* (Bookcraft, 1993), 132.

[57] Top, *Beyond Death's Door.*

Brigham Young taught that when enter into paradise we will be "free to travel with lightning speed."[58] And As quickly as the spirit is unlocked from this house of clay, it is free to travel with lightning speed to any planet, or fixed star, or to the uttermost part of the Earth, or to the depths of the sea, according to the will of Him who dictates.[59]

He was quite clear about the capabilities of the spirit:

[Spirits] move with ease and like lightning. If we want to visit Jerusalem, or this, that, or the other place—and I presume we will be permitted if we desire—there we are, looking at its streets. If we want to behold Jerusalem as it was in the days of the Savior; or if we want to see the Garden of Eden as it was when created, there we are, and we see it as it existed spiritually, for it was created first spiritually and then temporally, and spiritually it still remains. . . . God has revealed some little things with regard to His movements and power, and the operation and motion of the lightning furnish a fine illustration of the ability and power of the Almighty. . ..[60]

Margaret Toscano discusses how eternity is beyond time.[61]

(13) Receiving knowledge / realizing oneness/omniscience. Web of connection

Kenneth Ring referred to the more 'psi' aspects seen in elements 13-15 'transcendental awareness'.[62] These are some of the more remarkable elements and occurred to people who

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[58] See Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 14:231. Wagner, Danielle B. "Brigham Young's Near-Death Experience and What It Taught Him About the Spirit World - LDS Living." LDS Living, September 21, 2021. https://www.ldsliving.com/brigham-youngs-near-death-experience-and-what-it-taught-him-about-the-spirit-world/s/81924. RSC, "What's on the Other Side? | Religious Studies Center," n.d. https://rsc.byu.edu/vol-14-no-2-2013/whats-other-side, (accessed 11/13/2024). Brent L. Top, "Life After Death: 6 Insights Into the Spirit World - LDS Living." LDS Living, November 4, 2022, https://www.ldsliving.com/life-after-death-6-insights-into-the-spirit-world/s/77329.

[59] *JD* 13:77; --Also Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses,* 14:231; 13:77.

[60] Journal of Discourses - *JD* 14:231. Brent L. Top, "Death and the Spirit World: Latter-day Saint Teachings - BYU Speeches." BYU Speeches, March 15, 2021, https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/brent-l-top/thing-men-call-death-latter-day-saint-teachings-spirit-world/.

[61] Margaret Merrill Toscano, and Paul Toscano. *Strangers in Paradox: Explorations in Mormon Theology* (Signature Books, 1990).

[62] Kenneth Ring, and Sharon Cooper, "Near-Death and Out-Of-Body Experiences in the Blind: A Study of Apparent Eyeless Vision." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 16, no. 2 (1997): 143-6.

beforehand would not have been aware that such possibilities existed. On Earth our 'minds' appear to be confined withing out own heads, but in the other realms our minds are so powerful that they can experience events from the 'minds' of others, and the whole definition of 'me/ego' needs revision. Telepathic communication, access to wisdom, and feeling part of a web of connection is a common theme even in the 19th century e.g. Thos. S. Thomas (13i) and Hugh Nibley. (13ii) Russell Ricks felt part of Oneness and described pure intelligence entering his mind. Ranelle Wallace describes 'floodgates of knowledge' being opened to her, (13vi) while Angie Fenimore was 'immersed in pure knowledge (13vii). When Jeff Olsen thought of a question the answer was immediately there (13viii). Clayne Wayman saw a photo reel of every soul on Earth and when these photos were flipped over, he saw it was "me" (13xi). This message in particular has something in common with Buddhist and Hindu attitudes, that the 'ego/me" is an illusion and that we are all just part of the One. All the many 'atman' is the one 'Brahman'. There seems to be a 'tapping into' omniscience, which is usually reserved as an attribute of God in Christianity.

Theology

Learning and gaining knowledge is highly encouraged in the Church. "Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth was not created or made, neither indeed can be. All truth is independent in that sphere in which God has placed it, to act for itself, as all intelligence also." [63]

Brigham Young taught that "I shall not cease learning while I live, nor when I arrive in the spirit-world; but shall there learn with greater facility; and when I again receive my body [in

[63] Doctrine and Covenants, (1835), 211-12, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed April 17, 2023, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/doctrine-and-covenants-1835/219.

the resurrection], I shall learn a thousand times more in a thousand times less time; and then I do not mean to cease learning but shall still continue my researches."[64]

Orson Pratt taught that the spirit would have access to 'vivid knowledge': "knowledge will rush in from all quarters; it will come in like the light which flows from the sun, penetrating every part, informing the spirit, and giving understanding concerning ten thousand things at the same time; and the mind will be capable of receiving and retaining all." [65]

(14) Telepathic Communication telepathy

Telepathy and mind to mind communication is the preferred method of communication in the Spirit World and in my data, I proved twenty-one examples of this. Peter E. Johnson 1898 received answers to his questions without even having the time to 'voice' them! (14i) Mary Woolf's guide could read her thoughts. (14ii) and Jesus could read Russell Ricks', Betty Eadie's and Elance Durham's thoughts. (14iii), (14v) & (14vi). Ranelle Wallace describes communication as instant and total knowing (14viii), and Jeff Olsen could also feel the emotions and thoughts of hospital patients beside him! "I knew each person I saw perfectly. I knew their joys and their sorrows. He said: I knew their love, their hate, their pain, and their secrets."[66] (14x).

Theology

D & C states that God speaks to our minds and hearts.[67] Orson Pratt spoke a lot about communication in the Spirit World and described it as being 'mind to mind' without sound.

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[64] Brigham Young. *Teachings of Presidents of the Church.* (1997), 195.
[65] JD 2:246; Pratt, *Journal of Discourse*, 2:243.
[66] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts*, 35-36.
[67] Doctrine and Covenants, 8:2–3.

How do you suppose that spirits after they leave these bodies, communicate one with another? Do they communicate their ideas by the actual vibrations of the atmosphere the same as we do? I think not. I think if we could be made acquainted with the kind of language by which spirits converse with spirits, we would find that . . . they have undoubtedly a more refined system among them of communicating their ideas[68]

(15) Knowing the thoughts and feelings of other beings and forms of life. Mind Reading

Amazingly Russell Ricks described something akin to omniscience: "When I would focus on a particular object, such as a flower, I would comprehend and experience everything about it-from how it is created and by what power it was made to everything and everyone who had smelt, touched, or appreciated its beauty. I could feel the joy the flower had in the measure of its creation when it pleased all those who appreciated its beauty."[69] (14i). In the Spirit World the heavenly beings appear to know everything about the person visiting, their actions in life and their hidden thoughts. Also, as we will see in the 'life review' it is commonly described that each reviewer not only relives life experiences but 'feels the emotions' of those with whom they interacted. So, events are remembered both from the first and third person perspectives.

Thos S. Thomas's Glimpse of the Future describes his VTE in 1894 is both detailed and remarkable. In his panoramic OBE he witnessed multiple relatives' reactions to his 'demise' and as well as seeing telegraphs about him being written and sent he literally saw how the signals travelled down telegraph lines. He says he could travel faster than these waves, getting to the destination station before they did. "I saw the messages travel in waves across the wires" [70]

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[68] Journal of Discourses. 3:100–101.

[69] Ricks Russell, *Remember: A Little Boy's Near-Death Experience* (CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, 2017), 22.

[70] Thomas, *Glimpse of the Future*, 28. (link to location: https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/9c3bb56e-2a77-4aae-b5f9-480c828f6a2a/0/0).

C MEETINGS

The Divine

All my VTE data reports contain narratives of meeting various figures from the divine to angels, ancestors, and spirits. This communal aspect is both prominent and significant. Whilst individualism, a Western ideal, is documented, the connections of community and the integration into a larger social scene seems to be one of the main points of existence. Individual survival is less important than the continued survival of community and familial bonds. This contrasts somewhat with many generic NDE reports which even if they contain other personages, focus on the survival of the individual. E.g. Eben Alexander.[71]

(16) The Light of God, Heavenly Father.

In the Abrahamic traditions in general meeting God the Father is considered taboo, is not too overwhelming to survive, and yet since the idea of Heavenly Father in Mormonism is more anthropomorphic it is considered possible. E.g. Joseph Smith's First Vision. Some generic NDEs mention a being of light, and light is mentioned in Mormon NDEs, but this is not usually identified as God as it is in typical non-Mormon interpretations. Indeed, Brent Top discourages linking the 'being of light' with God. [72] Larry Tooley saw a brilliant golden white light like the sun which emitted love, and he was told it was the glory of God (16iv). Seeing the shining glory coming from a personage, however, is not the same as God himself it could be argued. Also, it must be noted that in Mormon doctrine there is no Holy Trinity, so Father, Son and Holy Ghost are considered totally separated entities. James Marsh 1838 talked with God and ancient prophets

[71] Alexander, *Proof of Heaven.*
[72] Top, *Glimpses Beyond*, 95, 97, 274.

in his experience (16i). Others see the throne, or glimpse into the celestial kingdom, such as Harriet Ovard Lee (16ii), and Clayne Wayman (16iv) and Angie Fenimore (17xiii).

(17) Meeting Jesus

Nineteen VTE reports in my data mention meeting Jesus or The Lord as he is often referred to. As brother to humanity, he is considered more approachable than his father and he tends to move around the Spirit World with more ease. He is instantly recognizable by those who encounter him, often dressed in white and always exuding love and acceptance. Tom Gibson (17vii) stressed Jesus's love. Kim Rives provides a detailed description of Jesus which includes his sense of humor (17xii). Jesus provided teaching to Russell Ricks and Angie Fenimore (17viii) & (17xiii). Jesus acted as Suzanne Freeman's guide out of body (17xiv). Denise Mendenhall hugged Jesus and Ralph Jensen stressed his sweet gentleness, calling him his eldest brother, the firstborn in the Spirit World. When Jesus hugged Ralph, the love was indescribable (18xvi). Julie Rowe saw the thrones of Father and Son (17xvii).

(18) Holy Ghost/Holy Spirit (There is no Trinity, rather three separate Godhead figures)

The Holy Ghost is often experienced on Earth as 'the promptings of the spirit' and was not literally seen in the Spirit World. Lance Richardson experienced the Holy Ghost in the traditional sense, as the teacher and bringer of truth (18i) Joe Wren actually heard the voice of the Holy Ghost commanding him to call for the paramedics (18ii).

The Holy Ghost is the third member of the Godhead, who "is a personage of Spirit."[73]

Comment

[73] D&C 130:22

The atonement of Jesus Christ and his role as savior cannot be understated in Mormon Theology. It is therefore understandable that VTErs would meet their savior and brother in the afterlife.

(19) Heavenly Mother [74] (See Appendix 3 p.60)

Mormons have the idea of God having a wife and she is referred to as Heavenly Mother, although he doctrine is obscure. Three female experiences encountered her, Kim Rives, Denise Mendenhall and Julie Rowe (19i) (19ii) & (19iii). Rives described her as an ideal type of figure, of great beauty and sanctity.

Theology

Amy Easton- Flake has discussed how Mormon women have imagined the Spirit World, in both pre and post mortal aspects and the existence of both a loving Heavenly Father and Mother. [75] She explains that Heavenly Mother appeared very rarely in nineteenth- century Mormon discourse, [76] but it was in poetry, such as in a 1945 poem written by Eliza Snow that empowered women express their conception of a Heavenly Mother.[77]

Givens mentions the history of the Mother as the wife of God, [78] and reminds us of the Proclamation of the Family, which describes us as the children of heavenly parents.[79]

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[74] See "Becoming Like God"; see also Elaine Anderson Cannon, "Mother in Heaven," in *Encyclopedia of Mormonism,* ed. Daniel H. Ludlow, 5 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 2:961. David L. Paulsen and Martin Pulido, "'A Mother There': A Survey of Historical Teachings about Mother in Heaven," *BYU Studies* 50, no. 1 (2011): 70–97.

[75] Jennifer McFarlane-Harris, and Emily Hamilton-Honey, eds., *Nineteenth-Century American Women Writers and Theologies of the Afterlife: A Step Closer to Heaven* (Routledge, 2021), 195-6.

[76] McFarlane-Harris*, Nineteenth-Century American,* 274

[77] McFarlane-Harris*, Nineteenth-Century American,* 196. (a poem by Eliza R. Snow, entitled "My Father in Heaven" and now known as the hymn "O My Father.") See also Jill Mulvay Derr, "The Significance of 'O My Father' in the Personal Journey of Eliza R. Snow," *BYU Studies* 36, no. 1 (1996–97), 84–126.

[78] Givens, *Wrestling the Angel,* 107-110.

[79] Givens, *Wrestling the Angel,* 1111.

"In 1909, the First Presidency taught that "all men and women are in the similitude of the universal Father and Mother and are literally the sons and daughters of Deity."[80] Modern church leaders have mentioned Heavenly Mother in their preaching. President Harold B. Lee said, "We forget that we have a Heavenly Father and a Heavenly Mother who are even more concerned, probably, than our Earthly father and mother, and that influences from beyond are constantly working to try to help us when we do all we can."[81]

(20) Mary Mother of Jesus

Only one VTE mentioned Mary, Mother of Jesus. Jennie Schnackenberg 1896 had a vision of Mary and the infant Jesus when she was sick during pregnancy.[82] (20i) Jennie had formerly been a Lutheran and it could be argued that this influenced her interpretation of her vision. Generally, Mormons do not focus on the Virgin Mary to the same extent as Roman Catholics and more traditional mainline denominations.

(21) Meeting Prophets

Eleven VTEs in my data mention meetings with The Prophets. Prophethood is very important in Mormonism and relates to Prophet in the Hebrew Bible, The New Testament, The Book of Mormon, Joseph Smith, and the Prophet who leads the Church. The current and 17th Prophet of the LDS Church is Russell M. Nelson. It is believed that the Prophet is open to revelation from Heavenly Father. Joseph Smith's visions of earlier Prophets were key to the restoration and the continuation of authority. Harriet Beal (21i) saw Joseph Smith, as did Harriet

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[80] "The Origin of Man," Improvement Era 13, no. 1 (Nov. 1909): 78. "Mother in Heaven," January 2, 2016, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/mother-in-heaven?lang=eng.

[81] Harold B. Lee, "The Influence and Responsibility of Women," Relief Society Magazine 51, no. 2 (Feb. 1964): 85.

[82] Jennie Schnackenberg, 1896-, *Jennie Schnakenberg Letter, Sioux City Iowa to Bureau of Information.* Salt Lake City. Manuscript on Microfilm call # MS 12663 (100005015776) Church History Library.

Lee (21ii) William Raymond (21iii) and Kim Rives (21x), whereas others such as Francis Woodbury (21iv) Archie Graham (21vi) and Suzanne Freeman (21xi) also saw Brigham Young. Joseph F. Smith saw many biblical and Mormon Prophets, (21vii). Freeman also meets Adam and Eve and chats with Eve casually! (21x).

The Angelic

Early journals and magazines, such as the Deseret Weekly, are full of testimonies of heavenly messengers. There is often confusion whether angels are a separate species or also deceased relatives performing angelic roles. Both types occur in VTEs. Generally, angels have jobs to do, intervene on Earth, act as guides. They are often described as beautiful, dressed in white and without wings. There are angels and general, some accompany Jesus, and then there are guardian angels.

(22) Angels

Eleven VTEs discuss angels. Jennie Schnakenberg's angel was beautiful, and his feet did not touch the ground (23ii). Peter Johnson met his guardian angel who says he followed Peter constantly on Earth (23iii). Scott Drummond also met his guardian angel who helped him come out of body to the Spirit World as a guide (23vii). Brian Glenn, a child, referred to angels as 'birdies' who were beautiful and dressed in white (23v). Kim Rives gave a detailed description of angels. She says that her angel cured her breast cancer (23viii) and adds that their job is to provide assistance from the other side of the Veil to those on Earth (23viii). Freeman adds that all we have to do is to ask angels for their help (23ix). Lance Pederson frequently saw angels visit him in around his sick bed. He adds a belief here that I encountered a few times I my research, that angels help protect evil spirits from possessing our bodies when we are sick (23x). Denise Mendenhall and later Chad Daybell also had these beliefs.

Comment

Angels figure prominently in Christianity and in Mormonism. It was the angel Moroni who appeared to Joseph Smith from 1823 onwards and led him to the golden plates, and this angel was the first in many angelic visions in Mormon history.[83] Cherrie Lyn Anthony's book *Reaching through the Veil: Angels in Everyday Life* describes the still strong current belief in angels intervening in everyday life.[84] Angels figure in the Mormon Scriptures and personal writings. Anthony describes their roles of serving the Lord, influencing people and ministering to people.[85] Angels can deliver messages about Temple work that needs to be completed and also protect people.[86]

Lundahl wrote a paper on the role of angels who frequently appear to serve as guides, escorts or messengers in the VTE.[87]

Lundahl's article on angels highlights their role as guides, messengers and escorts.[88]

FAMILY MEETINGS

Family is very important in LDS culture, and it is not interrupted by death.[89] These meetings in the VTEs are literally physical. People are not ghostly specters merging with their misty selves. The Spirit World is flesh and bone and almost the same as Earth without suffering and illness. The VTEs in my data present the perfect Mormon world. There is a curious lack of

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[83] Joseph Smith History 1:36, 40-41, 54.

[84] Sherrie Lyn Anthony, *Reaching through the Veil : Angels in Everyday Life* (CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, 2016).

[85] Anthony, *Reaching through the Veil,* 808, 899, and 936.

[86] Anthony, *Reaching through the Veil,* 1296, 1370,2020.

[87] Lundahl, Angels in Near-Death Experiences, 49–56.

[88] Lundahl, Angels in Near-Death Experiences, 49–56.

[89] The Doors of Death April 1992 Elder Russell M. Nelson. Nelson says that. " Loving relationships continue beyond the doors of death and judgment. Family ties endure because of sealings in the Temple." Nelson, By Elder Russell M., "Doors of Death," April 2, 1992, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1992/04/doors-of-death?lang=eng.

inquisitiveness about persons from other eras and cultures, religions. Most experiencers meet persons that that know, and sometimes see others that they do not, but most of the people seen are Mormons.

(23) Greeted by friends and family.

Lorenzo Dow Young and Jedidiah Grant both saw acquaintances and the righteous in the Spirit World (24i) (24ii). Grant saw his wife and learned that their deceased daughter Margaret who had died and been eaten by wolves on the trail was safe and whole now with her mother. Marba Peck Hale was welcomed and greeted by friends and family. Returning to the Spirit World is described as a big homecoming, and a celebration. There are over thirty examples of VTE experiences involving family and friends. Rather than repeating them all, it is sufficient to say that all the narratives were very similar. News was exchanged, hugs given, conversations shared, food shared, visits and tours conducted. People were flesh and blood, young fit and healthy and either wore white clothes or recognizable clothes from their former wardrobes. Some relatives had to introduce themselves because they had passed away before the experiencer was born. E.g. Rowe (24xxviii). Jane Moe met her father-in-law whom she had never met. She was able to relay precise and verifiable information back to her husband that only he knew (24xxx). Since the VTErs were set to return and it was not their time, some relatives expressed surprise at seeing the VTErs there. E.g. See Heber Hale (24xv).

Theology

Joseph F. Smith said 'Indeed our deceased loved ones are greatly concerned about our well-being and happiness and can be appointed, when there is a need, to bring messages of warning, reproof, or instruction to us'.[90]

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[90] Joseph F. Smith. Gospel Doctrine (5th edition 1919), 436.

Family is the foundation and priesthood holders are expected to be married, which is ordained by God…indeed the motivation for polygamy was not lustful but rather spiritual i.e. the provision of opportunities in the eternal realms, since the sealed and eternally married can progress the furthest there according to the doctrine of exaltation. [91]This is the idea of marriage for time and all eternity which death cannot divide.

"We have more friends behind the Veil than on this side, and they will hail us more joyfully than you were ever welcomed by your parents and friends in this world., and you will rejoice when you meet them than you ever rejoiced to see a friend in this life."[92]

(24) Seeing dead relatives and friends - including those not known to be dead

Ella Jensen saw a boy in the Spirit World that she did not know had died on Earth. (25i)

Comment

Lundahl and Widdison noted the friendships that continue from Earth to the spirit world. The social aspect of friendships and family continue on the other side.[93]

(25) Age and physical wellbeing of family Everyone is young and healthy

Thirteen VTEs describe that the dead friends and relatives all looked wonderfully well and in the prime of youth. All their physical ailments on Earth had vanished, and the elderly were now about age thirty. See William Raymond (26i). Experiencers also felt well with no pain. E.g. Dr. Wiltse (26ii) and Scott Drummond (26vi). The following met beautiful young

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[91] D&C 14:7; D&C 76:59.

[92] Brigham Young. Journal of Discourses. v. 6 (1859), 349.

[93] Craig R. Lundahl, and Harold A Widdison. "Social Positions in the City of Light." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 4 (1993): 231–38.

grandmothers or grandfathers: Kim Rives (25v), Suzanne Freeman (25vii), Elane Durham (25ix), Kim Wallace (25x) and Lance Richardson (25xi).

Comment

In Alma it is written: “The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame ...Now, this restoration shall come to all, both old and young ... both male and female ... and even there shall not so ·much as a hair of their heads be lost; but everything shall be restored to its perfect frame.” [94] We are made in the likeness of God and perfection is our true nature.[95] President Woodruff had visions of the Prophet Joseph Smith, Hyrum, Brigham Young and others in the Spirit World. He said a "spirit continues to exist in another realm called 'the Spirit World' and still maintains its form and shape and identity.”[96] Most VTE’s however agree that all ailments, pain and disability is gone.

Death is described in Alma, as well as the body after death. [97]There is both spiritual and physical death.[98]

Alma 11:43: **“**The spirit and the body shall be reunited again in its perfect form; both limb and joint shall be restored to its proper frame,”

(26) D LIFE REVIEW. ARRIVING HOME.SELF-JUDGING

(26) Life review

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[94] Alma, 11:43-44.

[95] D&C 77:22; Also see Dana, *Prophetic Teachings,* 21.

[96] Hartman Rector Jr., in *Conference Report,* October 3, 1970, 73.

emphasis added. Jeremy, “Hartman Rector Jr.: From Weakness to Strength - Apr. 1970 - My Life by Gogo Goff.” My Life by Gogo Goff, August 7, 2024, https://mylifebygogogoff.com/2024/08/hartman-rector-jr-from-weakness-to-strength-apr-1970.html.

[97] Alma, 11:43 https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/alma/11?lang=eng.

[98] Alma, 11:42; 12:16, 24; 42:8, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/alma/11?lang=eng. Mormon 9:13. (on the Redemption of Man).

The life reviews experienced by VTErs are linked to the plans and covenants made before incarnation on Earth. [99] There is this individual life plan which is related to the general Plan of Salvation.[100] Not everyone experienced a life review. Mark Pedersen for example didn't but he did have an 'interview' with the Holy Spirit before he could enter the city of paradise.[101] Charles J. Lambert 1996, had a full and clear recollection of all his Earthly deeds, as did the spiritual entities around him (27i). Thos. S. Thomas said that all memories of one's past are made plain (27ii). Lawrence Tooley says that he had total life recall from birth until his deadly accident. Then as he embraces his family members, he experiences their life reviews from their perspectives also (27iv). Elane Durham had a full life review like a movie (27v), whereas Sarah Menet saw her life through a window (27vi). Scott Drummond watched a video of his life, good and bad (27vii). Ranelle Wallace's life flashed before her, and she felt her impact on others, but as with all the other experiencers, she was not judged (27viii). Suzanne Freeman was shown her entry in the Book of Life by Jesus (27xii). Julie Rowe also saw the Book of Life in the form of a computerized database with videos. These two memories are reminiscent of generic NDE reports of the Akashic Records. Amy Call learned to appreciate the perspective of her abuser and feel compassion from her life review (27xiii). While there is accountability, this life review is not the final judgement according to doctrine but is both a learning experience and a way to sort the temporary placement of persons in the Spirit World according to deeds. A measure of self-judgment is applied, whereas the onlooking entities are compassionate and accepting. Time is

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[99] "What Happens After We Die? | Come Unto Christ," n.d. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/comeuntochrist/believe/life-has-purpose/what-happens-after-we-die, (accessed 11/13/2024).

[100] See Bruce Dana p. 6 Also see Dieter F. Uchtdorf's discussion about following a map of your life on Earth. Your Wonderful Journey Home April 2013 by Dieter F. Uchtdorf. Uchtdorf, By President Dieter F. "Your Wonderful Journey Home," April 2, 2013. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2013/04/your-wonderful-journey-home?lang=eng.

[101] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 106.

reported to be different on the other side so in minutes or seconds of Earth time, full life reviews were made.

Theology

The life review is not meant to be a full judgement, but rather a time for self-reflection.

The Prophet Joseph Smith said that the dead will be judged out of records kept on Earth. We will also be judged out of the "book of life," which is kept in heaven.[102] (Hence the importance of libraries in in VTEs – one mentions Book of Life)

President John Taylor taught: "[The individual] tells the story himself, and bears witness against himself. … That record that is written by the man himself in the tablets of his own mind, which record that cannot lie will in that day be unfolded before God and angels, and those who shall sit as judges."[103]

Joseph F. Smith taught this truth: The spirits of all men [and women], as soon as they depart from this mortal body, whether they are good or evil, we are told in the Book of Mormon, are taken home to that God who gave them life, where there is a separation, a *partial judgment.*[104]

(27) Premortal Life and returning home.

Mormonism is unusual amongst Christian denominations; in that it proposes a premortal life and the idea of the afterlife as a continuation of our eternal home.[105] Thus, one has always

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[102] D&C 128:6–8

[103] *Deseret News,* Mar. 8, 1865, 179.

[104] Joseph F. Smith, *Improvement Era,* June 1914, 7:619. -- as written in Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith* (Deseret Book, 1971), 448. -- For doctrine on the final judgement see Terry B. Ball, "The Final Judgment," in The Book of Mormon and the Message of the Four Gospels, ed. Ray L. Huntington and Terry B. Ball (Provo, UT: Religious Studies Center, Brigham Young University, 2001), 1–18. RSC, "The Final Judgment | Religious Studies Center," n.d. https://rsc.byu.edu/book-Mormon-message-four-gospels/final-judgment, https://rsc.byu.edu/book-Mormon-message-four-gospels/final-judgment, (accessed 11/13/2024).

[105] 1 Ne. 13:39, 40.

lived in the Spirit World as a child of God, Earth is a brief learning experience to do service, complete a mission, and grow, and then there is the return home. Both Mormon VTEs and generic NDEs commonly contain the description of the other side as home, and the 'real' place for us to be, more real than Earth. Fifteen VTEs discuss this 'going home' experience. May Farnsworth 1888 was happy to go home (28i). Early VTE's talk of coming to Earth like going on a mission and describe souls queueing up to be born on Earth. (Hancock 28ii) & (Thomas 28iii). Numerous persons were relived and happy to be 'home' and wanted to stay in this familiar place. It was some homely that some VTE's reported that one was able to build one's own home there according to preference! (Richardson 28x) & (Freeman 28xi). Kim Rives was back in her well-remembered bedroom with a bed covered in a dusty rose bedspread (28xv).

Comment

"Home", meaning the Spirit World, seems so normal, and more normal than Earth, according to the experiencers. Another word could be "natural" according to Brigham Young who said.

> When you are in the Spirit World, everything there will appear as natural as things now do. Spirits will be as familiar with spirits in the Spirit World —will converse, behold, and exercise every variety of communication one with another as familiarly and naturally as while here in tabernacles. There, as here, all things will be natural, and you will understand them as you now understand natural things.[106]

Harold Widdison wrote in detail about what he described as our original heavenly home.[107] The idea of home really cannot be understood without considering the doctrine of

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[106] Brigham Young, *Teachings of the Presidents of the Church: Brigham Young. Selected by John A. Widtsoe.* Ch 38 (1941,380). "Chapter 38: The Spirit World," January 1, 1997. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-brigham-young/chapter-38?lang=eng.

[107] Harold A. Widdison, *Trailing Clouds of Glory: First Person Glimpses into Premortality* (Horizon, 2004).

premortality. [108]If we lived in the Spirit World with our heavenly parents before birth, then logically we are going home after death and when we arrive back, we remember what the Veil made us forget during our Earthly life. This is why VTEs contain many pre-birth memories and people encountered there are recognized. Widdison reports that "We all become Earthbound when we forget who we really are- magnificent eternal beings with a divine heritage from a heavenly home, here temporarily on Earth."[109]

(28) View of the past premortal life

This aspect of VTEs, seeing premortal life, is different from anything that can be found in other modern forms of Christianity. Both Ricks and Tooley remember their premortal lives there and Tooley remembers he promised to marry his wife in the Temple…which he still had not done on Earth (29i) & (29ii). Eadie not only recognizes Jesus but remember being with him before her birth (29iii). As Elane Durham remembers her premortal life and new memories start to return about it. Generic NDEs sometimes mention a premortal life, and there are various New Age/New Religions approaches to explain the process of how amnesia is imposed on those born on Earth to preserve free will. Some, like Wallace (29vi), say not just their premortal life but had a review of the history of the Spirit World in a sort of cosmic world review. Richardson remembered promises he had made before in Earthly incarnation (29ix). Ralph Jensen was given a tour and rewatching of all cosmic history since the war in heaven, Earth's creation, and how it all tied into theology (30iv).

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[108] By Elder Neal A. Maxwell, "Premortality, a Glorious Reality," October 2, 1985, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1985/10/premortality-a-glorious-reality?lang=eng.

[109] Widdison, *Trailing Clouds of Glory,* 292.

The premortal life is referred to as the 'first state'. Our Spirits existed before they came to this world. We were in the councils of the heavens before the foundations of the Earth were laid. We were there. See: Joseph F. Smith.[110]

(29) View of the past – immersion in history since creation onwards - historical review and meeting historical figures.

Just as the individual has a life review, some people experienced a community 'life review' including the history of the world, and the universe since creation. This history also contains scenes of a possible future, both in terms of a personal life and in terms of the future of the world.

David B. Haight was shown a life Review of Jesus' life (30i). and Mendenhall was shown the history of all creation and the world (30ii). Ralph Jensen was given a tour and rewatching of all cosmic history since the war in heaven, Earth's creation, and how it all tied into theology (30iv).

The idea of authority comes in here. In the 19th century VTERs were seeing visions of Bible figures and Book of Mormon figures which conferred authority to them and validity to their visions, but in the 20th century and later, meeting 19th century church leaders conferred authority. This may explain why some VTErs meet historical figures in reviews of past history they witness. Freeman was introduced to the founding fathers of the United States by Jesus! She reports that she met Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams. She did not meet political enemies of the U.S. (30v).

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[110] Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine: Selections from the Sermons and Writings of Joseph F. Smith* (Deseret Book Co., 1976). 52.

E. CHILDREN IN THE SPIRIT WORLD, BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER EARTHLY BIRTH.

(30) Children

Children are very important in Mormon family life, and it must be remembered that until recently women had many babies and few survived, especially in on the pioneer treks. Many women died during or after labor also. This trauma is still recent and new generations have not forgotten. It is not surprising that children feature in VTEs. Adoption is always encouraged and was an alternative to childbearing and was indeed commonplace in the 19th and early 20th century when maternal mortality and death in general was more common. Nevertheless, the genetic blood connection is of great importance. Ralph Jensen answers the dilemma of what happens to childless families. He says "If our lives, for one reason or another, are such that having a family is impossible, we will have a chance to create a family during the Millennium of Peace"[111] It is also understood that adoptions are pre-arranged in the Spirit World before birth and that parents and spirit children make arrangements for Earthly birth before the parents incarnate. Ella Jensen saw children being taught in school in the Spirit World (31i). Bertha Elder saw many young children and asked her spirit guide if she could return to Earth to give birth to one (31iii). It is unusual to see the young in any afterlife scenarios as both in VTEs and NDEs spirits are around 30 years of age. Even in some VTEs those who died as children are seen as adult. It is only those who are still not born on Earth who seem to be portrayed as very young. There is variation. Mary Hales 1925 saw her dead infant sister playing with other children in a forest playground (31iv).

Theology

[111] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 47.

Child mortality was common and heartbreaking in the 19th century, especially on the frontier and amongst pioneer communities. A theological explanation for the death of innocents was necessary.

Joseph F. Smith explained:

The spirits of our children are immortal before they come to us, and their spirits, after bodily death, are like they were before they came. They are as they would have appeared if they had lived in the flesh, to grow to maturity, or to develop their physical bodies to the full stature of their spirits. If you see one of your children that has passed away it may appear to you in the form in which you would recognize it, the form of childhood; but if it came to you as a messenger bearing some important truth, it would perhaps come as the spirit of Bishop Edward Hunter's son (who died when a little child) [112]came to him, in the stature of full-grown manhood, and revealed himself to his father, and said: 'I am your son.'

Also, children who have not had the opportunity to grow up and get married will be allowed all the blessings required for exaltation.[113]

Joseph Smith said:

The Lord takes many away even in infancy, that they may escape the envy of man, and the sorrows and evils of this present world; they were too pure, too lovely, to live on Earth; therefore, if rightly considered, instead of mourning we have reason to rejoice as they are delivered from evil, .and we shall soon have them again. [114]

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[112] Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine,*455.

[113] Bryant S. Hinckley, *Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin J. Ballard,* (Deseret Book Company, 1949), 260. For the doctrine see: Joseph Smith, and Joseph Fielding Smith. *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith : Taken from His Sermons and Writings As They Are Found in the Documentary History and Other Publications of the Church and Written or Published in the Days of the Prophet's Ministry* (Deseret Book, 1976),354.

[114] Joseph Smith, "The Prophet's Sermon of Life and Death; the Resurrection and the Salvation of Children," *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith,* selected by Joseph Fielding Smith (Deseret Book Co., 1976), 196, 197.

Woodruffe also said “no matter in what age they may have lived, will claim those children in the morning of the resurrection, and they will be given unto them, and they will grace their family organizations in the celestial world.” [115]

(31) Children who die in infancy and under the age of eight.

(32) Miscarriages and aborted children

Loise Goates 1890 sees her stillborn babies in the Spirit World in the arms of others. (32i) Archie Graham sees playgrounds full of happy children. (32ii)

b) VTE’s contain not just deathbed experiences but all experiences with the Veil and birth is one of these sacred times when the Veil is crossed.

Sarah Hinze, one of the most prolific writers on children and the premortal life has written about her own personal experience with her unborn child. Since the Spirit World is there both before and after death, many VTEs include those not yet born, and is not limited to a simple afterlife scenario. Her books describe both LDS and non-LDS stories of children and their parents interacting before their birth. She writes: “Before each of our nine children was born, I sensed that he or she was preparing to come to Earth. I prayed for the safe arrival of each of these special spirits. I received the gift of increasing visits from my preborn through the Veil… it was their time to come to Earth with a personal mission only they could fill. We were honored by a prebirth visitation from Becky's future brother, who was announcing it was his time to come to Earth. The sacred experience faded as my future son concluded his mission and departed. I have come to understand that the unborn often visit their future families and homes.[116] She calls

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[115] Wilford Woodruff, as written in *Deseret News: Semi-Weekly,* July 20, 1875 (Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1866-1922), 84-85.

[116] Sarah Hinze, *Coming from the Light* (Cedar Fort, 1994), 10. It is identical to her later book of a different title We Lived In Heaven.(Spring Creek Book, 2006). This was Chad Daybell’s company!

these visits – “these hallowed experiences.” With my fifth pregnancy I sorrowed greatly upon losing the baby to miscarriage (32bi).

She then had dreams and revelations and understood the lost baby would return to her in another pregnancy and Sarah was born. At another time she was visited three times by the spirit of a young man who announced he would be born to her. She was pregnant and gave birth to Matthew.

Freeman ‘died’ during an ectopic pregnancy, and she learned that babies who are miscarried or aborted can chose to be reborn (33x).

She wrote her books to contrast with Raymond Moody’s *Life After Life*, and to counter the typical assumption that life begins at conception and the polarity trope in popular culture of birth vs death. In reality she argues they are just the entrance and exit for our temporary life performance on the stage or school of Earth, just part of our whole existence in eternity before and after Earthly life. Her work focuses on prebirth memories, visions of one’s premortal life and premonitory dream announcing a pregnancy and birth of a child. The testimonies are from the mothers who communicated with these angels who were soon to be born as their children. This is a common genre of writing in Mormon literature, and it reflects the theological belief in the premortal existence, and the idea that Earth lives and parents are planned and chosen, before a spirit becomes embodied.

Disclaimer: I myself have had a private pre-birth memory which was confirmed later by the words given in my Patriarchal Blessing, I also had an angelic dream announcing the birth, which occurred eight months later, of my youngest son Ebrahim in which the angel handed me the infant and announced his name, and I have had two VTE like ‘dream’ experiences, once at home and once in a hospital in a non-life-threatening situation. I met Sarah Hinze, and we

discussed our experiences. I directly purchased from her a DVD copy of her latest documentary called “Remembering Heaven.”

Theology

Joseph Smith said: “I also beheld that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven.”[117]

Opinions vary about when a spirit enters the womb of the mother, some suggest at the time of conception. Brigham Young held to the common belief that it was a the time of quickening, when the baby’s movements are felt by the mother.[118] It is accepted that children under the age of accountability, around eight years of age are innocent and saved through the atonement of Jesus Christ.[119]

As seen in the VTE’s children can appear either as small or as fully grown adults to those on Earth. Melvin J, Ballard, related an appearance of his deceased son: "I lost a: son six years of age and saw him as a man in the Spirit World after his death.” [120] Bishop Edward Hunter also saw his son as fully grown and not understanding how this could be when the son had died in infancy, asked Hyrum Smith why is this so? Hyrum answered that, just like Jesus, children were fully grown in the premortal life and after their mortal lives.[121]

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[117] D&C Section 137: 10. A vision given to Joseph Smith the Prophet, in the Temple at Kirtland, Ohio, January 21, 1836. The occasion was the administration of ordinances in preparation for the dedication of the Temple.
D&C 137, 1–6, The Prophet sees his brother Alvin in the celestial kingdom; D&C 137, 7–9, The doctrine of salvation for the dead is revealed; D & C 137, 10, All children are saved in the celestial kingdom. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/137?lang=eng&id=2,3.

[118] Brigham Young speaking at the funeral services of Thomas Williams. Salt Lake City, Sunday morning, July 19: 1874: see journal of Discourses, 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1854-86), 17:143.

[119] See Dana, *Prophetic Teachings,* 67.

[120] Bryant S. Hinckley, *Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin Joseph Ballard,* 18th ed. (Deseret Book Co., 1973), 260.

[121] Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 4, 55. Dana, *Prophetic Teachings,*59.

Joseph Smith said, “If you see one of your children that has passed away it may appear to you in the form in which you would recognize it, the form of childhood.” [122] After a vision of the celestial kingdom, Joseph Smith stated: "And I also beheld that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability, are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven."[123]

Lundahl wrote an article discussing the unborn children residing tin the Spirit World. He said. “Seeing unborn children in the NDE suggests that people move into this Earthly sphere from another realm, just as the NDE suggests that we can move from this sphere into another realm upon death.”[124]

33 Visions of the unborn before birth on Earth

[me-pre-existence and predestination in order of birth and death all arranged from the Spirit World. Like we have freedom but little in terms of birth and death]

Ella Jensen saw Alphie in the schoolroom but was puzzled why he was there if he was alive…she later found out he had died when she was ill (33ii). A mother of thirteen ‘died; and was told by spirits to return because two spirit children needed her to give birth to them. She recovered and gave birth to two more children (33iii). Similarly, a man was told to return because he had to father more children. His wife then bore two more babies (33iv). A story told in 1964 was about a woman who had a VTE and met a boy and girl crying under a tree. They told her they needed her to live so she could be their mother. She recovered and went on to have children of both genders. (33v) Wallace meets a child waiting to be borne by her. She thought

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[122] Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 4,55. Also Dana, *Prophetic Teachings,*59.

[123] Joseph F. Smith, "Vision of the Celestial Kingdom (*Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith),* 107. Joseph Smith Jr., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,* edited by B. H. Roberts, 7 vols. (Deseret Book, 1973), 2:1381.

[124] Craig R. Lundahl, “Near-Death Visions of Unborn Children: Indications of a Pre-Earth Life.” *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 2 (1992): 123–28, 124.

she could not get pregnant, but she did have two more children (32ix). Henry Zollinger saw the children that would be born into his family in the future (33vii). Tooley meet his dead baby sister as an adult woman (32viii). Holland Young, a child, met her unborn sister in her VTE and predicted her birth. Holand sadly died but two years later her sister was born (33xi). Mark Pederson wrote that he met the child of a friend who had died in a car accident whilst pregnant. "I could see that the spirit of the unborn child had returned to the Spirit World and was now waiting to be assigned to a new birth mother. I was shown several candidates including the sister of my friend's wife."[125]

Comment

Lundahl wrote an article about visions of unborn children and indications of a pre-Earth life. In this article Lundahl discusses VTEs in which visions of yet unborn children suggest a life before their birth on Earth, in the premortal realm. There appears to be some kind of blending yet differentiation between the pre and post mortal worlds. These premortal spirits appear in what is the afterlife from an Earthly perspective. This relates to the theme of seeing spirits that would be born into the family of the experiencer.[126] He concludes that "Seeing unborn children in the NDE suggests that people move into this Earthly sphere from another realm, just as the NDE suggests that we can move from this sphere into another realm upon death."[127] In VTE stories women are often told that they need to return to give birth to children who are waiting in the spirt world to be born.[128]

Theology of Children

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[125] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 99.

[126] Craig R. Lundahl, "Near-Death Visions of Unborn Children: Indications of a Pre-Earth Life." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 2 (1992): 123–28.

[127] Lundahl, Near-Death Visions of Unborn Children, 124.

[128] Lundahl, Near-Death Visions of Unborn Children, 127.

Children hold a treasured and important place in LDS Theology. A prominent idea is that children chose to come to certain parents as part of a promise made mutually in preexistence. This is similar to the agency of a person in the Bardo of Becoming in Tibetan Buddhism, who sees the parts and chooses the womb. In Joseph Smith's Vision of the Celestial Kingdom, he saw "that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven." [129]Moreover, President Joseph F. Smith made the following explanation:

"Joseph Smith taught the doctrine that the infant child that was laid away in death would come up in the resurrection as a child; and, pointing to the mother of a lifeless child, he said to her: 'You will have the joy, the pleasure, and satisfaction of nurturing this child, after its resurrection, until it reaches the full stature of its spirit.'[130]

"Father (Hyrum Smith, the Patriarch) told him that the Spirit of Jesus Christ was full-grown before he was born into the world; and so our children were full-grown and possessed their full stature in the Spirit, before they entered mortality, the same stature that they will possess after they have passed away from mortality, and as they will also appear after the resurrection, when they shall have completed their mission." (*Gospel Doctrine,* 5th ed., Deseret Book Company, 1939, p. 455.)

Elder Melvin J. Ballard observed:

"You mothers worry about your little children [who have died]. We do not perform sealings for them. I lost a son six years of age, and I saw him a man in the Spirit World after his death, and I saw how he had exercised his own freedom of choice and would obtain of his own will and volition a companionship, and in due time to him, and all those who are worthy of it, shall come all of the blessings and sealing privileges of the house of the Lord. Do not worry over it. They are safe; they are all right. "Now, then, what of your daughters who have died and have not been sealed to some man? … The sealing power shall be forever and ever with this Church,

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[129] D&C 137:10.

[130] Smith, Joseph F., Gospel Doctrine, 455–56. Joseph F. Smith, The Prophet's Sermon of Life and Death, 196–97, 200, 368. "Sources for Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith. The Church Historian's Press.," The Joseph Smith Papers., 2024, accessed November 13, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/articles/sources-for-teachings-of-js-by-joseph-fielding-smith.

and provisions will be made for them. We cannot run faster than the Lord has provided the way. Their blessings and privileges will come to them in due time. In the meantime, they are safe." [131]

Just as Humans have children, they are the literal children of God in a physical sense. "All human beings—male and female—are created in the image of God. Each is a beloved son or daughter of heavenly parents, and, as such, each has a divine nature and destiny."[132]

The Spirit World is a temporary abode until the resurrection.[133]

Joseph Fielding Smith said: "When men [and women] die they do not go into the presence of God, they do not go into the celestial kingdom. Where do they go? They go into the world of spirits, the righteous into paradise, where they await the resurrection. It is not until after the resurrection that they shall enter into their exaltation."[134]

F. PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF THE SPIRIT WORLD

Elder Charles W Penrose, wrote a significant description of the Spirit World:

> There are conditions of spirit life between death and the resurrection. There are two grand divisions in the Spirit World; the good gravitate to and associate with I the good; the bad with the bad. There are doubtless many subdivisions in each of these spirit spheres, according to the various grades and qualities of the individuals and their course of life when in the body. They are capable of receiving information, can exercise faith, repentance and obedience, or take an opposite course. Volition, or will power, is an attribute of the spirit of man, and that *is* why he is responsible for his conduct whether in the body or out of the body, and why, therefore, he will be brought to judgment, and his eternal status will be "according to his works."] The portion of the Spirit World where the good dwell between death and the resurrection, is sometimes called *paradise,* and that where the evil abide is called hades, or *hell.*[135]

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[131] Bryant S. Hinckley, *Sermons and Missionary Services of Melvin J. Ballard* (*Deseret* Book Company, 1949), 260.

[132] The First Presidency and Council of the Twelve Apostles, "The Family: A Proclamation to the World," *Ensign*, November 1995, 102.

[133] Alma, 40:5-6, 9

[134] Joseph Fielding Smith, address give December 30, 1934. See *Utah Genealogical and Historical Magazine* (Salt Lake City: Genealogical Society of Utah, April 1935), 26:59.

[135] Charles W. Penrose, (C.W.P.) Soul Spirit Breath and Life. The Latter-Day Saints' Millennial Star. Thursday, March 14, 1907. 168-171.

Elder Joseph F. Merrill, taught:

> When death comes the departed spirit, a personal entity of the form of the Earthly body, is conducted to a prepared place in the spirit world. Here the spirit, a knowing, intelligent personal being, will live until the day of the Resurrection.
> It. is important to understand that the spirits of the dead do not all go to ·the same place. The spirits of saints and sinners, for example, cannot live together. Each spirit goes to a place for which the Earth-life of the individual has qualified it to dwell. The wicked will not live in realms of joy, but saints will-the degree of joy or sorrow of everyone who dies being governed by his merits.[136]

(34) Realness of the perceived experience and perceived realm

Several VTEs remarked about how 'real' the spirt world was and how 'real' the whole experience felt. It was not imaginary in their opinions. Charles John Lambert 1886 said **"**What I have described, however, was as real as anything could be, and was not imaginary." [137] (34i) Lorena Wilson called it real and natural. (34ii) Hannah Savage said the beings she saw there were 'real'. (34iii) Heber Q. Hale 1920 stated: "I know that I actually saw and experienced the things related in this Heavenly Manifestation, and they are as real to me as any experience of my life.[138] (34iv) Ricks 1966 qualified this saying, "everything seemed so incredibly real… the whole experience' seemed more vibrant and real than the reality we experience here on Earth." [139] (34v). Tom Gibson and Amy Call both testified to the reality and physical nature of the afterlife world (34vi) & (34vii).

(35) Where is it?

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[136] Joseph F. Merrill, *The Millennial Star,* February 13, 1936, 98:104.

[137] Charles John Lambert.

[138] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho. Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920). Special Collections and Archives, McKay Library, BYU-Idaho, "A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale, President of Boise Stake, Idaho," n.d., https://spc.byui.edu/idurl/1/1710, (accessed 11/13/2024).

Special Collections and Archives, McKay Library, BYU-Idaho., "A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale, President of Boise Stake, Idaho," n.d., https://spc.byui.edu/records/item/1710-a-heavenly-manifestation-to-heber-q-hale-president-of-boise-stake-idaho?offset=3.

[139] Ricks, *Remember: A Little,* 20.

Heber Hale and Mark Pedersen said that the Spirit World is nearby and very close (35i) & (35iii). Jensen said it is as easy to get there and return as rising from and sitting in a chair. (35ii) He added "The spirits worship in the same chapels that we use to worship in here in Earth. The Spirit World is very close, and it co-exists beside us here he says. It is here on Earth and not beyond the sun. "As Brigham Young noted-and I clearly witnessed-the postmortal Spirit World simply co-exists with Earth life in an entirely different dimension that is invisible and imperceptible to us. Upon dying, any heaven or paradise we go to is right here-this is why we call where we will go the 'Here-after."[140]

Theology

The Spirit World is understood to be here but in another dimension that is invisible to humans on Earth. Joseph Smith said, "Our deceased family and friends are not gone, neither are they far, far away in some distant "heaven."

Prophet Joseph Smith taught, "They are not far from us, and know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and motions, and are often pained therewith."

Also, he said: "The spirits of the just are exalted to a greater and more glorious work; hence they are blessed in their departure to the world of spirits. Enveloped in flaming fire, they are not far from us, and know and understand our thoughts, feelings, and motions, and are often pained therewith." [141]

Brigham Young taught:

> Where is the spirit world? It is right here. Do the good and evil spirits go together? Yes, they do. . .. Do they go to the sun [or some other planet]? No. Do they go beyond the

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[140] Jensen, *Taught by Christ*, 42.

[141] Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith,* selected by Joseph Fielding Smith (Deseret Book,' 1976), 326.

boundaries of this organized Earth? No, they do not. They are brought forth upon this Earth for the express purpose of inhabiting it to all eternity. [142]

He also taught: “They can see us, but we cannot see them unless our eyes were opened.”[143] And he asked: "Is the Spirit World here?"… "It is not beyond the sun but is on this Earth that was organized for the people that have lived and that do and will live upon it."[144]

Parley Pratt wrote about the Spirit World: '.'As to its location, it is here on the very planet where we were born." [145] and then he offered a more verbose description:

the Earth and other planets of a like sphere, have their inward or spiritual spheres, as well as their outward, or temporal. The one is peopled by temporal tabernacles, and the other by spirits. A vail is drawn between the one sphere and the other, whereby all the objects in the spiritual sphere are rendered invisible to those in the temporal.[146]

Harold B Lee said “The Spirit World isn't on another planet millions of miles away. *The* Spirit World *is right here on this Earth."*[147] And “The Spirit World is right here around us.’ [148] The Book of Abraham 3:3 mentions Kolob as the nearest star to the throne of God.

(36) Beauty of the Spirit World

The Spirit World is incredibly beautiful, a paradise. John Powell describes its houses and trees (36i). Thos S. Thomas describes the beauty of nature there (34iv). When eleven-year-old Mitchell Dalton 1895 is revived he tells his parents he went to such a beautiful place (36v).

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[142] Journal of Discourses*,* 3:369.

[143] Teachings of the Presidents of the Church Brigham Young. 280. (See also chs. 37 and 38. 281, in this book).

[144] Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses* 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1854-86), 3:372.

[145] Parley P. Pratt, *Key to the Science of Theology,* 3rd ed., (Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1883), 129-30.

[146] *Key to the Science of Theology,* 3rd ed. (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Steam Printing Establishment, 1874), 129–30.

[147] Harold B. Lee, "Funeral Services for Mable Hale Forsey," October 24, 1960; 12.

[148] Teachings of the Presidents of the Church, Harold B Lee, 58.

Jennie Schnackenberg beheld beauty everywhere...and danced and sang with happiness (35vi). Ricks experience feels real and more beautiful than anything he had ever seen. [149] (36 xiii) Rowe saw beauty wherever she turned (36 xvi). There is consensus of amazing beauty, and no one reported it as anything less.

Beauty is an aspect of aesthetics and is often embedded in cultural values. Ideas of beauty ideas have changed in human cultures. The beauty of the afterlife however seems to be more than this, and more than the perfections the Mormon community could imagine. It is a more visceral certainty that nothing else could ever compete. It is so beautiful that even human language cannot describe it. Everything is more amazing than can be imagined, the grass and flowers are fully conscious. They radiate love and communicate…. It is fantastical.

(37) Ineffability – inadequacy of our five senses

Not only is the beauty ineffable, meaning there are no Earthly words to describe it, the Earthly five senses seem also inadequate to take it in and spiritually enhanced senses operate to perceive it. Ricks says that language to describe his experience is inadequate **[150]** (37i). This ineffability is mentioned by Tooley, Wallace and Drummond. (37ii) (37iii) & (37iv). Richardsen and Jensen echoed these sentiments (37v) & (37vi).

NATURAL ASPECTS OF THE SPIRIT WORLD

(38) Music

Music was reported by many visitors to the Spirit World, and it came not just from beings but from plants, flowers, and the water too. Joseph Eldridge, Harriet Lee, and David Kimball all heard beautiful singing (38i) (39ii) & (38iii). over a dozen others also described the wonderful

[149] Ricks, *Remember: A Little,* viii.
[150] Ricks, *Remember: A Little,* xx.

music. Mendenhall said music came from roses. Wallace reported "the whole garden was singing. The flowers, grass, trees, and other plants filled this place with glorious tones and rhythms and melodies" [151] (38xi) & (38x), Freeman heard angels sing (38ix). With a more modern spin, Richardson, in the 2000 millennium era, saw spirits playing keyboards! (38xiv).

(39) Colors and heightened senses

Many reported having heightened senses, better vision, and awareness. This helped them perceive colors that are not found on Earth. The variety of colors was reported as early as 1858 by Jacob Hamblin (39i). Peter Johnson said he could hear whispers from another room far away, but he heard them clearly (39iii). Sarah Menet had such good eyesight she could see for miles. Drummond, Rives and RaNelle Wallace were in awe of the amazing and new color (39vii) (39viii) & (39 ix). Wallace counted millions of shades that defy comprehension. Olsen reports that "My natural senses were magnified to a greater degree."[152] And "My perceptions were expanded."[153] (39x). Richardson was enthralled (39xi). Most of this beauty refers to nature, but the cities are also beautiful and glisten with gold.

(40) Animals[154]

Animals, both pets and wild animals, are reported in the Spirit World. Row describes fish (40i). Mendenhall sees "horses, alligators, rabbits and dogs and swims with the dolphins. Jesus and I then flew like the birds alongside an eagle."[155] (40ii). Richarson meets a tame lion and golden eagle. All animals live in peace together, he adds (40iii). Moe says pets were seen in heaven and Pedersen sees a park full of animals (40v) & (40iv).

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[151] Wallace, *Burning Within,* 101.
[152] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 31.
[153] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 35.
[154] D&C, 77:2.
[155] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 49-52.

(41) Plants, trees, and flowers in the Spirit World

Jedediah Grant in 1856 saw beautiful gardens (41i). George Albert Smith 1909 reported "I found myself standing with my back to a large and beautiful lake, facing a great forest of trees." (41ii). In 1918 Archive Graham gave a detailed description of the grain in fields, the lawns, forests, and types of trees and all their colors. He saw exquisite flower gardens (41iv). Twenty-five VTEs in my data go into detail, repetitively of all the foliage and gardens, trees, flowers, and natural settings in all their glory. For example, Freeman writes: "The walks were lined with flowers that were mesmerizing in their perfection.' Then I realized that not only were they swaying in perfect time to the voices singing in precise harmony. They were also making flawless music of their own, like an orchestra accompanying the vocals. They appeared to be a type of orchid or lily, and no two flowers were the same. Their coloring was absolutely exquisite. They had a light within them that made them shine with a soft glow..." (41xxiii).

Theology

Brigham Young said about the similarity of the Spirit World to Earth: "When the [last] breath leaves the [mortal] body, your life has not become extinct; your life is still in existence. And when you are in the Spirit World, everything there will appear as natural as things now do [on Earth]. [156]

(42) Planets

[156] Young, Journal of Discourses, 7:239. "If You Could Hie to Kolob," n.d. https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/music/library/hymns/if-you-could-hie-to-kolob&_r=1?lang=eng&_r=1, (accessed 11/13/2024).

Mormon Theology has been very modern when discussing planets and their inclusion into destinations for spirits in the future of the cosmos. There is a Mormon hymn including the planet Kolob. “If you could hie to Kolob in the twinkling of an eye …”[157]

Over a century before the first moon missions Jacob Hamblin wrote "During the time my body lay in this condition, it seemed to me that my body went up from the Earth and looked down upon it, and it appeared like a dark ball.” (42i). Tooley and Eadie were both taught that God had created other worlds and galaxies to be explored (42ii) & 42iii). Fenimore said “I was told that there are countless worlds revolving around countless suns, and each is inhabited by children of God, who are subject to these same laws.”[158] (41v). Richardson could see other planets on his tour of the Spirit World (41vi). When Sarah Menet was returning to her body, she traveled through outer space then she saw a light and a panorama of the Earth, and she flew towards it (41iv). Similarly, Sarah Menet, saw the letters NOVATA written above the planet Earth, and she learned it has a spirit, and an intelligence.

URBAN AREAS OF THE SPIRIT WORLD

Not everyone would expect to see buildings in the Spirit World, but this is how it is described by many experiencers including over twenty VTEs in my data. What is expressed in some is that the buildings are products of wish fulfilment, and that worthy Church members can ‘imagine’ their dream homes into being. The following VTE’s state that the quality of one’s home reflects and is a reward for one’s spiritual level (Archie Graham 43x), (Mary Hales 43xii) (Tooley 43xiv) & (May Neville 43xi).

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[157] “If You Could Hie to Kolob.” Jannalee Sandau, “3 Fascinating Things About Kolob Every Latter-day Saint Should Know - LDS Living.” LDS Living, November 27, 2022, https://www.ldsliving.com/3-fascinating-things-every-Mormon-should-know-about-kolob/s/82249. Doctrine and Covenants 88:13).
Abraham 3:2-3, Abraham 5:13 Abraham 3:4-7.

[158] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness*, 126.

In a strange way the afterlife resembles the “American dream”. and it is linked to the Tibetan explanation of wish fulfillment and visualization.

(43) Cities and buildings

Some buildings are personal homes (Earl Stowell 43viii), while others are huge structures (David Kimball 43vii) & (J. Grant (43vi).

The cities are described as beautiful, resplendent with light, with fountains (Lorenzo D. Young (43iii). Some see city gates (H. Randall 43iv) & (Freeman 43xviii).

Golden doors and streets are a common theme (Richardson 43 xx), (Ricks 43xiii).

One example of a description is from Tom Gibson 1992:

> Daniel next led me to a city. It was a city of light similar to cities on Earth in that there were buildings and paths; but the buildings and paths appeared to be built of materials which we consider precious on Earth. They looked like . . . that is they resembled marble, and gold, and silver, and other bright materials, only they were different—the buildings and streets seemed to have a sheen, or to glow. The entire scene was one of indescribable beauty. . .[159] (43 xvii).

Brother Orson F. Whitney David had a number of visions and manifestations during a week in November 1881 when he was lost and without food or water on the Salt River desert in Arizona. I was then taken in the vision into a *vast building,*” [160]

President Joseph: F. Smith recorded a dream he had while he was serving a mission when he was young. In this dream he was on a journey, and he felt impressed to hurry for fear that he might be late. In his words, he said that "I came *to a wonderful mansion,* it could be called· a mansion. It seemed too large, too great to· have been made by hand, but I thought. I knew that was my destination." [161]

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[159] Sullivan, *The Magnificent World of Spirits,* 89-90.

[160] Orson F. Whitney, "A Terrible Ordeal" *Helpful Visions,* 14th vol. in a series (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1887),13. Crowther, *Life Everlasting,* 77.

[161] Joseph F. Smith, *Gospel Doctrine*, 541-42.

Comment

Lundahl and Widdison wrote an article describing the City of Light, saying: "The City of Light appears to be a world of preternatural beauty that cannot be described adequately"[162]

(44) Temples (See Appendix 3)

Temples are very important in LDS Theology, but in descriptions of the Spirit World, Temples are not mentioned much, perhaps because their function and role are different in the afterlife, which is related to genealogical work and sealings on Earth for those in the Spirit World. On Earth they are sacred heavenly places, but the Spirit World itself is a sacred place. Herman Stulz 1921 (44i) mentions approaching a gate that reminded him of the Salt Lake City Temple gate. Archie Graham saw a glorious building larger than but resembling the Salt Lake City Temple.

There are also VTE's that occurred on Earthly Temples. Seeing spirits of ancestors in Temples is a common story in LDS circles. Josephine Brewer met a ghostly lady after she had performed her Temple world in the 1940s (44iii). Little Brian Glenn recovered from his accident and later pointed to a picture of the Oakland Temple and said he had seen it in heaven.

Comment

Wilford Woodruff said: "Joseph Smith [the Prophet] continued visiting myself and others up to a certain time, and then.it stopped. The fast time I saw him was in heaven. In the night vision I saw him at the door of the Temple in heaven. He came to me and spoke to me." 29[163]

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[162] Harold A. Widdison, and Craig R Lundahl. "The Physical Environment in the City of Light." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 4 (1993): 239–46.

[163] Wilford Woodruff, *The Discourses of Wilford Woodruff,* selected by G. Homer Durham (Bookcraft, 1969), 288.

(45) Celestial City

Some VTE's mention the Celestial Kingdom, which is reserved for the most holy Beings and Heavenly Father for now, until the end times when perfected Mormons can enter. Charles Woodbury 1954 was able to look at it through a curtain (45i). Tooley was also taken to see it but could only approach the boundary and look upon the golden spires and domes (45ii).

Theology

Joseph Smith described a vision of the celestial world:

> The heavens were opened upon us, and I beheld the celestial kingdom of God, and the glory thereof, whether in the body or out I cannot tell. I saw the transcendent beauty of the gate through which the heirs of that kingdom will enter, which was like unto circling flames of fire; Also, the blazing throne of God, whereon was seated the Father and the Son. I saw the beautiful streets of that kingdom, which had the appearance of being paved with gold."[164]

(46) Library

The 19th century VTE's do not mention libraries but early 20th century VTE's onwards do. Could this be related to the fact that the Free Public Library of Salt Lake City was only opened as the first library in Utah in 1989? Mormons were erudite, wrote copiously and read…but libraries were private rather than public until the 20th century. This might indicate that the afterlife reflects the society and institutions of the era and location on Earth. Harriet Lee 1901 says that people were reading books and later describes the names of the dead being recorded in a large book. (46i) Durham sees a building full of scrolls "in which there is an interactive screen like 'sea of glass' around which everyone stood to observe the events on Earth in past and future." [165] (46iii). This was before we had interactive screens, which are the most modern 'book' form. Menet also sees an interactive screen version of the Book of Life (46iv). Rowe was

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[164] D&C, 137: 1-4, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/137?lang=eng.
[165] Durham, *I Stand All Amazed,* 71.

shown a library by her guide. She says, “I then saw a great panorama of historic events. I clearly remember these because I was shown these scenes in the library, as well as later on my journey-through the "Window of Heaven”. “She also saw the future too with the lead up to the second coming and the building of Zion on Earth and the establishment of the New Jerusalem on the American continent... Later she mentions the window of heaven again. “The Window of Heaven." He told me I would be shown many things, some of which were just for my knowledge and understanding.” (46vi).

When Eadie entered the library, she saw no books, but ideas and knowledge entered her mind (47ii). Call learned knowledge such as a caution to only eat organic foods (46vii).

(47) Genealogical work in library

Tooley sees a white domed building full of books and manuscripts with people using them to work on genealogy (47i). Wallace and Rowe also see people working on genealogy (47iii) & (47iv).

(47b) Link between genealogy work on both side of the Veil

Genealogical work is geared toward completing ordinances which are necessary to release those in Spirit Prison who have progressed and accepted the gospel. There is the idea that the dead needed those on Earth to complete their Temple work for them. Archie Grahm’s guide explained to him how ordinances are received in the Spirit World. (47v) Pamela Issacson also discusses the importance of collaboration on both sides of the Veil to complete ordinances and sealings (47vi).

Comment

Joseph and Sidney were also shown a vision of those who had succumbed to the power of Lucifer. See D&C 76: 25-49. Spirits can progress after receiving gospel teaching: D&C 138.

(48) Technology

Some VTE's mention technology that was not yet invented. Charles Evans 1897 talks about the 'Urims' which men look into to get scientific information. George Smith 1909 (46ii) had his life review by looking at a flying picture on a screen. Moving pictures were just being invented but still not widespread. In 1979 Rives described what seems to be an interactive touch screen eBook on a tablet on which she sees meadows and plants in a rural scene and a hologramic woman who sang. She also saw a small tablet on heavenly mother's belt that was like a TV screen (48iii).

OTHER AREAS OF THE REALMS

(49) Dark places/ Spirit Prison – Missionary work

1896 Jennie Schnackenberg: "Then she felt smothered in darkness. She cried out and said she would obey, and the darkness lifted, and she beheld beauty everywhere"[166] (49vi).

Lorenzo Young saw multitudes of miserable people who had rejected their salvation and brought condemnation on themselves (49i). Joseph Eldrige described being attacked by an evil being and then being rescued by an angel (49ii). Jedediah Grant saw a vision of hellish hosts but said they have no power in the Spirit World (49iii).

A few mentions missionary work preaching to those in Spirit Prison (Johnson 49viii),(Peterson 49 v), (Graham 49ix), (Zollinger 49x), (Jensen 49xii) & (Rowe 49xi).

There is no concept of a permanent hell in Mormon Theology. As Thos. S. Thomas said, **"**There is no hell like that which is pictured here on Earth." [167] (49vii).

Theology

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[166] Jennie Schnackenberg, 1896-. *Jennie Schnakenberg Letter, Sioux City Iowa to Bureau of Information.* Salt Lake City. Manuscript on Microfilm call # MS 12663 (100005015776) Church History Library.

[167] Thomas, *Glimpse of the Future,* 64.

On Earth Temple work is conducted for the redemption of the dead, and work in this effort also takes place in the Spirit World. The restored gospel is preached to those in Spirit Prison who did not have the opportunity to accept in on Earth. Repentance is still accepted there. There is no equivalent of the medieval eternal hell as a place of punishment with no recourse to forgiveness.

30 But behold, from among the righteous, he organized his forces and appointed messengers, clothed with power and authority, and commissioned them to go forth and carry the light of the gospel to them that were in darkness, even to all the spirits of men; and thus was the gospel preached to the dead.

31 And the chosen messengers went forth to declare the acceptable day of the Lord and proclaim liberty to the captives who were bound, even unto all who would repent of their sins and receive the gospel.

58 The dead who repent will be redeemed, through obedience to the ordinances of the house of God,[168]

There is no eternal hell because with the doctrine of progression, progress and acceptance of the Gospel can occur in Spirit Prison. A good explanation is found in Wesley White's book Where Do We Go from Here? The Answers to Your Questions About Our Next Life.[169] If some spirits are in despair, it is self-inflicted. Satan has no hold over those in the Spirit World.

Joseph and Sidney were also shown a vision of those who had succumbed to the power of Lucifer.[viii] See D&C 76: 25-49.

Brigham Young declared: "Compare those inhabitants on the Earth who have heard the Gospel in our day, with the millions who have never heard it, or had the keys of salvation

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[168] D&C 138:29-37, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/138?lang=eng&id=29-37#p29.

[169] Wesley M. White, and Rachel P Andersen. *Where Do We Go from Here? The Answers to Your Questions About Our Next Life* (CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, 2020), 64.

presented to them, and you will conclude at once as I do, that there is an almighty work to perform in the Spirit World."[170]

President Joseph F. Smith's Vision of the Redemption of the Dead[171] describes how those lost in the Spirit Prison can receive salvation and the message of redemption. In other worlds the mission to save souls is occurring not just on Earth but on the other side too. This is a very generous and loving theology and paints the picture of a truly loving and forgiving God. This compassionate theology can be compared to other views of hell where after death there is eternal suffering with no mercy.

Jesus sets and example of being a missionary to preach to the Spirit World, and others will do this same work. [172] His work, atonement, resurrection, allows for redemption, forgiveness and resurrection for humankind.

A place called Spirit Prison is reserved for 'those who [have] died in their sins, without a knowledge of the truth, or in transgression, having rejected the prophets.' [173]

Elder Neil L. Andersen explained that: "There is a hell for the evil and wicked. What that means would take too long to explain, but I do not see it as the paintings of Dante's *Inferno.* Rather, it is a place where one comes to understand the terribleness of his actions, and guilt and remorse bring extreme sadness and sorrow. [174]

(50) Hierarchy in the Spirit World and heavens

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[170] Journal of Discourses*,* 4:285.
[171] D&C 138:29–37
[172] see 3 Ne. 23:9–10 Also see Moses 1:39.
[173] D&C 138:32
[174] Reflections on Life After Death. April 2021. By Elder Neil L. Andersen, "Reflections on Life After Death," April 1, 2021, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2021/04/united-states-and-canada-section/reflections-on-life-after-death?lang=eng.

Just as the LDS church and society had hierarchy, this is reflected in the Spirit World. The Plan of Salvation is all about progressing and evolving higher and higher up the 'ladder' to spiritual perfection. William Wallace describes perfect order and hierarchy based on priesthood standing in the Spirit World (50i). Thomas also states that hierarchy is linked to one's intelligence (50ii). Jensen says society is ordered perfectly with authority in charge. (50iii) Hale reports that people are classified according to their purity (50vi). Eadie, Durham and Menet refer to different levels of heaven and the Spirit World (50vii) (50viii) & (50ix).

The Spirit World has hierarchy just like on Earth, and men keep their positions as priesthood holders. Brigham Young said: "When the faithful Elders, holding this Priesthood, go into the Spirit World they carry with them the same power and Priesthood that they had while in the mortal tabernacle."[175]

Theology

Apparently, righteous people in the Spirit World are organized just as they are here, arranged in families and quorums. [176]Priesthood operates there as it operates here. President Brigham Young declared: "When the faithful Elders, holding this Priesthood, go into the Spirit World they carry with them the same power and Priesthood that they had while in the mortal tabernacle." [177]

President Wilford Woodruff taught: "The same Priesthood exists on the other side of the Veil. … Every Apostle, every Seventy, every Elder, etc., who has died in the faith as soon as he passes to the other side of the Veil, enters into the work of the ministry"[178]

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[175] *Discourses of Brigham Young,* p. 132. See also D&C 124:130.
[176] D&C 138:30.
[177] *Discourses of Brigham Young,* 132. D&C 124:130.
[178] *Deseret News,* Jan. 25, 1882, 818.

The blessings of the priesthood are thus present in the Spirit World. One elder who passed beyond the Veil and returned spoke of the order he saw there:

"While I was in the Spirit World, I observed that the people there were busy, and that they were perfectly organized for the work they were doing. It seemed to me a continuation of the work we are doing here, —something like going from one stake to another. There was nothing there that seemed particularly strange to me, everything being natural."[179]

Joseph Smith said: "the same sociality which exists among us here will exist among us there."[180] [181]

Brigham Young said: "spirits will be as familiar with spirits in the Spirit World —will converse, behold, and exercise every variety of communication with one another as familiarly and naturally as while here in tabernacles."[182]

Widdison mentions: "Multiple heavenly realms different levels" and adds "In each heaven are many communities separated from each other by the state of love exhibited by its inhabitants. Within a given community all the individuals are distinguished from each other according to the light they exhibited…the people at the center are in the greatest light."[183]

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[179] Peter E. Johnson, *Relief Society Magazine,* Aug. 1920, 455.
[180] D&C 130:2.
[181] D&C 130:2.
[182] Brigham Young, in *Journal of Discourses*, 7:239.
[183] Widdison, *Trailing Clouds of Glory,* 5871, 5895.

Spirits inhabit different levels based on their spiritual progression, with the more righteous attaining higher levels. [184]Just as on Earth, there is hierarchy and the Church continues there.[185]

Brigham Young said "And when we have passed 'into the sphere where Joseph [Smith] is, there is still another department, and then another, and another, and so on to an eternal progression in exaltation and eternal lives. That is the exaltation I am looking for."[186]

(51) Moral and spiritual hierarchy is mirrored in the afterlife in different leaves and realms that match the level of the inhabitants.

Richardson explains that the Spirit World is a place where people wait for the resurrection (51i).

Comment

Lundahl and Widdison studied Mormon VTEs and concluded that the social positions of the inhabitants of the Spirit World are comparable to positions on Earth. There are men and women and various relatives and friends, in addition to missionaries or administrators, genealogists, guardians, guides, homemakers, missionaries, teachers and students.[187]

(52) Goal of apotheosis and progression

Says that progression is important, and the aim is to become like the Father (52i). Jensen describes progress in the Spirit World (52ii).

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[184] Jesus declared, "In my Father's house are many mansions" (John 14:2).

[185] D&C 138:18-19, 27, 30. Brigham Young, *Journal of Discourses,* 3:371. *Woodruff Journal of Discourses,* 22:333-34. Joseph Smith, *Teachings of the Prophet Joseph Smith,* selected by Joseph Fielding Smith (Deseret Book, 1976), 169. Charles W. Penrose, *The Millennial Star,* March 14, 1907,69:168-69. See also *Journal of Discourses,* 26 vols. (London: Latter-day Saints Book Depot, 1854-86), 23:161. On progression, see Wilford *Woodruff, Journal of Discourses,* 21:318.

[186] *Journal of Discourses* 3:375, 6 February 1853. Eugene England, "Perfection and Progression: Two Complementary Ways to Talk about God." *Brigham Young University Studies* 29, no. 3 (1989): 31-47.

[187] Craig R. Lundahl, and Harold A Widdison, "Social Positions in the City of Light." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 4 (1993): 231–38.

"Heaven is more than reunion with God. The highest salvation or exaltation involves participation in the divine nature." [188]

Theology

Joseph Smith taught on human 'intelligence' which is the immortal spirit with no beginning or end: "The mind or the intelligence which ban possesses is coequal [meaning co-eternal] with God himself."[189]

(53) Non-Mormons in Spirit World (See Appendix 3)

One question I had when reading all the descriptions of the afterlife concerned the absence of non-Mormons. One VTE answered this. Wren said, "I briefly saw about ten people of every religion and nationality from this he learned that not group of people is more important, we are all important to God."[190] (54i) However this sighting is rare, and Wren wrote recently, and this might have aligned with his own views. Lorenzo Young saw beings next to his sick bed and his guide dressed in white. (54i) Eldridge was given white clothes to wear by the angel guide. (54ii) Harriet Lee wore white. (54iii) Eadie saw white clothes being woven on looms. (54xiii)

G SOCIETY IN THE SPIRIT WORLD - FAMILY AT THE CENTER/ SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE SPIRIT WORLD

Theology

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[188] Givens, *Wrestling the Angel*, 46. D&C 92:29. Man was also in the beginning with God. Intelligence, or the light of truth, was not created or made, neither indeed can be.

[189] King Follet Discourse in Smith, *Teachings,* 158.

[190] Wren Round Trip Death Podcast by Eric Bennet on Spotify.

Elder Maxwell says that the Spirit World is vast, but it is a house of order. Demographers estimate seventy billion people have lived in Earth so far. He adds continued learning and progression still apply in Spirit World.[191]

Joseph F. Smith had a vision of Spirit World society:

As I pondered over these things which are written, the eyes of my understanding were opened, and the Spirit of the Lord rested upon me, and I saw the hosts of the dead, both small and great. "And there were gathered together in one place an innumerable company of the spirits of the just, who had been faithful in the testimony of Jesus while they lived in mortality.[192]

A similar vision stressing the importance of society was described by Oscar W. McConkie, who was given a vision of the Spirit World, and he too saw large gatherings of people interacting one with another. One group he described, who was listening to one missionary, he estimated numbered between 20 and 30 thousand.[193]

Theology

Just as the Church is very ordered on Earth, so it is in the Spirit World.[194]

(54) White robes

[191] Neal A. Maxwell, *The Promise of Discipleship* (Deseret Book Company, 2017), 110.

[192] D&C 138:11-12, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/manual/doctrine-and-covenants-student-manual/section-138-vision-of-the-redemption-of-the-dead?lang=eng.

[193] Robert L. Millet, and McConkie, Joseph Fielding, The Life Beyond (Deseret Book Company, 1986), 55-57. "Reflections on Life After Death," April 1, 2021, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/liahona/2021/04/united-states-and-canada-section/reflections-on-life-after-death?lang=eng.

[194] D&C 20:68; 82:20; 132:18. See Dana, *Prophetic Teachings* ,97.

Eleven VTE's describe people dressed in white robes in heaven. Guides Angels and Jesus are also depicted as wearing white clothing (Rives 54xv). White clothing is worn in the Temples on Earth.[195]

(55) Food

This is the ultimate in physicality…food is not required for the body but signifies social interaction benefit and pleasure. On Earth Relief Society potlucks are replicated and ensure continued social bonding. Both old and modern VTEs refer to food. Most Christians would assume that there is no food in heaven, imagining it to be a more ethereal place. William Wallace 1881 said, "They eat and drink, and hold meetings like we do, and I ate with them." (55 i). Menet reports women eating cake and fruit (55ii). Freeman had dinner with Jesus and Joseph Smith and Emma Smith." We sat down to a meal of roasted chicken, biscuits, corn on the cob and mashed potatoes with gravy. Again, there was no actual dead chicken sitting on the table. It was all energy formed and flavored in whatever way the diners wished." (55iii). Richardson (55iv) and Moe (55vi) mentioned food and feasts, and Rowe saw Women preparing meals and snacks of bread, fruit, and vegetables (55v).

(56) Relatives in Spirit World concern for us on Earth and do work for us. Genealogy and Temple work requests.

This element represents the links across the Veil between members of the Mormon community. Relatives in the Spirit World ask for genealogical and ordinance work to be done for them on Earth by returning persons and they also ask for messages to be sent to their family

[195] See Dana, *Prophetic Teachings,*119. (on Clothing in the Spirit World).

members. This often becomes a main reason to return to Earth. The mission on Earth is Temple work for ancestors. Harriet Beal's aunt asked her to prevent a sealing to her husband (56 i). Mrs. Woodbury was given names to add to Temple work when she returned (56ii). Peter Johnson was told to do his father's and ancestors' work when he returned (55iii). Henry Zollinger was also asked to do Temple work (55iv). A dozen VTEs emphasize the ancestors demands to have their Temple work completed. It is a major theme. Murdock says his relatives were displeased with him for neglecting their Temple work (56ix).

So, if those on Earth do Temple work for the dead, ancestors have power to intervene and help the living on Earth. It is a symbiotic relationship across the Veil. Richardson mentions spirits helping their families from the other side (56xii). Moe adds that spirits can do service by helping those on Earth (56 xiii).

(57) Prayer

Prayer is an important daily practice. Mat Farnsworth's guide (1888) told her that prayers are answered (57i). Richardson says that God answers prayers (57ii). Moe says her ancestors hear her prayers and join in her prayers (57iii). Eadie saw prayers shoot up to the heavens from Earth to reach angels who come to help (57iv).

(58) Busyness and industry in the Spirit World

The Protestant work ethic is transferred to the Spirit World. People are always occupied and very busy. There is no room for the idle. They hurry to do work before the Second Coming, such as completing ordinances. However, why hurry if time is eternal there and differs from time on Earth? Hard work, necessary to survive the trek to Utah and building the new community, is a virtue that those in heaven possess. Eldrige described active busy people in the Spirit World in 1833 (58i). Harriet Lee saw people preaching (58ii). Ella Jensen describes business and no

evidence of idleness (58iii). Woodbury said that people are happy and busy (58 iv). Peter Johnson saw order and hard work (58vi). Woolfe (1914) says spirits they were so busy they did not notice her (58viii). Archie Graham describes caretakers busy in the gardens who also attend a class twice daily (58ix). Almost thirty VTEs describe this work, all describing urgency and busyness. Ralph Jensen's family were too busy to spend time visiting with him (58xvii). Tooley saw a painting and sculpting class (58xiii).

Comment

Givens explains the idea of business (being busy) and industry:

Mormonism's collapse of sacred distance is pronounced, its vision of heaven one of almost seamless continuation of the quotidian. Families continue, homes and gardens continue, bodily existence on a glorified place continues, education continues. Mormonism is of all religions perhaps the most relentlessly incompatible with traditional Christian conceptions of heaven… most historic version of the heaven has emphasized rest, contemplation and praise – eternal enjoyment as a perpetual bliss of state rather than activity. Mormon heaven is full of activity.

(59) Knowledge gained from the visit to the Spirit World/ We all have a life plan/ progression

Archie Graham's guide explained to him that Earth is a school of experience where people make choices. The goal is self-improvement (59i). Richardson was told by the spirit called Randy, to take a message back to his wife about following the life plan (59ii).

(60) Experiencer and other spirits able to see family on Earth from the Spirit World

Charles Lambert 1886 was able to see his rescuers pulling his body out from under a log in the water, but they could not see him (60i). William Raymond 1881 reported that people in the Spirit World were aware of what happened on Earth (60ii). When Mr. Whiting was in the Spirit World, he could see his family crying on Earth (60iii). Herber Hale had the most remarkable experience in the Spirit World, "From a certain vantage point I was permitted to view the Earth and what was going on here. There was no limitation to my vision, and I was astounded at this. I saw my wife and children at home. I saw President Heber J. Grant at the head of the great Church… I saw towns and cities, the sin and wickedness of men and women. I saw vessels sailing upon the oceans and scanned the battle-scarred fields of France and Belgium [196] (60iv).

Edna Dyer 1924 saw her disheveled father in the kitchen at home, all lonely. Then she saw the choir in her chapel (60v). Kim Rives 1997 saw her family in their homes and later was able to authenticate her sightings with them (60vi). Julie Row (2004) also saw her family at home, and her husband crying and praying for her to be healed (60viii). Spirits are able to keep up with family news on Earth and discuss this during their visits with VTErs. (Mouritsen 60x) & Reba (60xi).

Theology

H. RETURNING

(61) Returning

The Return is one of most important aspects of VTEs. There are various aspects of the return from the 'physical' description to the choice, and the emotions. Some are 'sent back, some

[196] "A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (January,1920), https://spc.byui.edu/idurl/1/1710.

choose to return to family, others are summoned back by priesthood blessings. Then there is the aspect of pain when squeezing back into the body, and finally the mixed emotions of the return. VTErs are torn between wanting to remain in the Spirit World and reuniting with family on Earth. Widdison and Lundahl identified this as one of the main themes in the narratives. Whilst returning is often a voluntary decision, the experiencers are often shown the possible future if they chose to remain and others are sent back to mortal life, often told to carry out genealogical work.[197]

Rowe was told by her guide that it was "time to go." (61i). This is one of the most common themes, that there is a set time for us to die and if it is not our time we are sent back.

Fenimore sped and rushed back to her body and when she did pain returned (61ii).

When Eadie returned to her body, she found the body abhorrent and cold (62xv).

Olsen also returned to his pain ridden body. As soon as he imagined returning for his son, he was right back in his body which was heavy, dense, and painful (62iii).

Christ led Freeman and Mendenhall back to their bodies (61iv) & (61v).

Over forty VTEs detail aspects of the return, how it happened and what it felt like. The theme of agency, a key LDS doctrine, is paramount. Fifteen are given a choice to stay or go but twenty-three were sent back. Another seven were distinctly told it was not their time. The majority therefore have no choice in their return. The main reason to return is to continue the work they agreed to do on Earth before their birth, to help their family. Some are called back by their family prayers and blessings on Earth. (see Appendix 3, element # 61- 63).

(62) Being sent back choice agency

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[197] Craig R. Lundahl, and Harold A Widdison. "Social Positions in the City of Light." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 4 (1993): 234.

Some like Marriner Wood Merrill were given the choice to return or not (62i). Drummond was not given a choice but after his life review went straight back to his body (62xvii).

Archie Graham was given the choice and came back to do his ancestors' work. (62xi) Tooley chose to return to fulfil his promises and discussed this with a heavenly council. (62(xiv) Eddie chose to return to do work and was aided by a council of twelve men to make this decision (62xv).

John Boice's wife was given permission to return briefly for two hours, to tell her husband where her children should go after she died (62xxii).

Williams was told to go back and do his work (62xiii).

Olsen was sent back by his wife (62xix). A female messenger sent Richardson back (62xx) Moe is sent back by her father-in-law (62xxiv).

It's not your time: Cutler was informed he had to return because it wasn't his time.

Alpheus Cutler 1881 **"**I died once and was dead for some length of time. My spirit left my body and went to the land of spirits. I saw the crown that I should wear if l remained faithful, and the condemnation I should receive if l did not. I begged to remain but was informed that I must return and warn the people to repent, as my work on Earth was not yet done."[198] (62xli).

Mary Hales 1925 "It isn't your time yet," "Finally Howard [her brother] said, 'Don't you think it's time you went back?"[199] (62xliii).

Jabob Hamblin was told it was not his time. (62ii) Menet was told to return because it was not her time (62xvi).

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[198] Alpheus Cutler.
[199] Mary Hales.

Goates and Savage were made to return (62ix) (62x).

Others have to argue to return (62iii).

Some are sent back to complete their Earthly work. (Lee 62v) Cutler (62vi) Schnakenberg (62viii).

David P. Kimball's father told him that if he returned, he could choose for how long, **"**Father finally told me I could remain two years, and to do all the good I could during that time, after which he would come for me; he mentioned four others that he would come for also, though he did not say it would be at the same time." "Two years later, almost to the very day he had nearly died in the desert, David P. Kimball passed away." This is also an instance of verification because a prophecy came true [200] (62vii).

A remarkable description of a dramatic return is given by Amy Call. "The guide now told her it was time to go back. She said she didn't want to go back and did not think it was possible." Her guide told her to reach out and touch the planet (Earth) and she felt the energy, like electricity and a pulling sensation. "I saw a spinning vortex and then I felt that my guide and I were one. I reached into the vortex and willed to go forward. The vortex grabbed me and pulled in back. "I found myself in my bedroom and I couldn't feel a connection to my physical body and I was trying to get back into it. I saw my husband asleep. I panicked. My guide told me to go in through the throat. I saw my husband stir and a sound came out of my mouth. My husband shook me – flips the light on – shakes me and my body…I felt a pop… I started breathing again and got back inside my body." [201] (62xxiii).

(63) Choice to return to the body agency

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[200] David P. Kimball.

[201] Amy Call, YouTube, KMVT. Present! - Amy Call's Near-Death Experience. 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qX803D_cofI.

According to Brent Top it is often stated that the Prophet Joseph Smith taught that we have an appointed time for our death and that no righteous man dies before his time.[202]

One of the main reasons to return is to complete work. Work is very important, and this is more than the Protestant ethic, it is playing a role in fulfilling the Plan of Salvation. Brent Top mentions that President Wilford Woodruff taught that the priesthood and offices we hold in this life go with us into the Spirit World. We engage in the same types of service and ministry there that we use our priesthood for here. "Every man who is faithful is in his quorum there," he taught, "every apostle, every seventy, [every high priest], every elder, etc., who has died in the faith, as soon as he passes to the other side of the Veil, enters into the work of the ministry, and there is a thousand times more to preach there than there is here."[203]

Many of the popular modern books echo this theme of dying at an appointed time. Elder G. Stott stated in general conference 'We will live for our appointed life span."*[204]*

(64) Return party or goodbye ceremony

Some experience a *going home* party when they first arrive in Spirit World, others such as Freeman experienced a going back to Earth party. She danced with Jesus and "There was a big feast with tables as laden as a medieval banquet.'"[205]

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[202] "What's on the Other Side? A Conversation with Brent L. Top on the Spirit World." *Religious Educator: Perspectives on the Restored Gospel* 14, no. 2 (2016), 43-63. Ezra Taft Benson, "Spencer W. Kimball: A Star of the First Magnitude," *Ensign*, December 1985, 33.

[203] Brent Top, What's on the Other Side in *Religious Educator*. *Discourses of Wilford Woodruff* (Bookcraft, 1946), 77.

[204] By Elder Richard G. Scott, "How to Obtain Revelation and Inspiration for Your Personal Life," April 2, 2012, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/2012/04/how-to-obtain-revelation-and-inspiration-for-your-personal-life?lang=eng.

[205] Freeman, *Led by the Hand of Christ*, 133-134.

i) Mendenhall "Then many people came to the field, missions of them – all her relatives, her dead sister and aunt and prophets. Her primary teacher was there. They all gave her a rose and a hug. She hugs Heavenly Father and Jesus."[206]

(65) Reluctance to return

Lorenzo Young felt horror when he had to return to Earth (63i).

Ella Jensen hated to leave 'that beautiful place' (63ii).

Drummond did not want to return (62xviii). It is the predominant instinct to want to remain in the Spirit World. Ranelle Wallace refused to return but was persuaded so she could complete her mission of motherhood (62xviii),

Stanley Parker fought the physical return to his body (63v).

Mark Pedersen and Mitchell Dalton were both called back by their family prayers (62xxxix) & (63iii).

Kim Rives did not want to return to her body (63x), nor did Sellesa Snarr (63ix).

(66) Power of prayer and priesthood blessings to call back the dead to life

Priesthood blessing having the power to return people to this Earth from the Spirit World. Related to this is the idea that prayers and blessings (administrations) by the bedside of the sick could bring them back from death. This is repeated in many testimonies.

Priesthood holders summoned back Jacob Hamblin (64xviii). President Lorenzo Snow revived Elizabeth (64xix). Nearly twenty persons were brought back by priesthood blessings. Ralph Jense reports that he saw the blessing given by Brother Spencer when he floated above his body. Then he heard: "Brother Jensen, by the power of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and in the

[206] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 55.

name of Jesus Christ, I command you to return!... Once he had spoken the mind and will of the Lord, I was commanded by my visitors to return to my Earthly body." [207] (64xviii). Similarly, Ranelle Wallce reported. "Uncle Ivan is an Elder in his church and had wanted to give me a priesthood blessing to help me recover. He laid his hands on my head and felt impressed to command me, in the name of Jesus Christ, to be healed and live. The moment he did so my body literally jumped several inches off the bed." [208] (64xvii).

Phoebe Carter Woodruff (1807-1885) recounted by Wilford Woodruff, she died, he rebuked the power of death, and her spirit returned to her body." [209] He prayed and used sacred oil and commanded her spirit to return (64i).

Ella Jensen 1891 heard the command of President Lorenzo Snow to return as he stood by her 'dead' body." He said: 'Sister Ella, you must come back, as your mission is not yet finished here on Earth."[210] (64xvii).

Harriet Lee was returned by the blessings of Elder Paxman (64Xiii).

Eliza Ursenbach was brought back with a blessing also. "She opened her eyes and complainingly lisped: 'Why did you bring me back?' [not wanting to return] She is told 'The Priesthood is so powerfully exercised in supplication for your return, that heaven has granted that you return to your body to rear our children.'[211] (64xiv).

William D. Huntington received a blessing from Joseph Smith and two brethren in 1856. He said his body was loathsome, but when they prayed, he felt his spirit being drawn back to his body. This felt excruciating and he felt pierced all over (67iii).

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[207] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 5,7.
[208] Wallace, *The Burning Within,* 119.
[209] Wilford Woodruff, "Leaves from my Journal," 53-55.
[210] Ella Jensen.
[211] Eliza Ursenbach.

Mrs. Van Holden Peck was restored back after a blessing (64xv), as was Brigham Smoot (64xvi).

Peter E. Johnson,1898, saw the apostle place his hands upon the head of my prostrate body, and almost instantly I realized that the change had come, and I was again in the body. The first thing that I knew, I felt a warm life-giving spot on the crown of my head, (62xxvi).

Mark Pedersen was blessed both by Jesus and by a man in the hospital and that helped him return to his body (62xxxix). He said “"Heavenly Father;" I cried out, "I've seen enough of this world Please help me find my way back to my body… I remember walking toward the light at the far end of the tunnel. Upon exiting the tunnel of light, I found myself standing above my body in the Care Unit.”[212]

Comment

(For contemporary and historical Mormon ideas of raising the dead and faith healing see Bowman, Matthew. *Raising the Dead.* in W. Paul Reeve and Michael Scott Van Wagenen, eds. Between Pulpit and Pew: The Supernatural World in Mormon History and Folklore. Logan: Utah State University Press, 2011. 66-96.) Today the laying on of hands to heal the sick by priesthood holders is common practice, and I have been the recipient myself.

(67) Experience of returning to body

The most common experience is for the VTEr to see their body on the bed and to reenter it with some discomfort. Randall was conducted to Earth by her guide, entered her room and then her spirit entered her body (66i). Eldrige entered his body when it was being prepared for burial (66ii).

[212] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 131.

Two returns were temporary, and the return was just in order to deliver a final message. Martha Jane Boice 1840 and May Neville 1917 returned from the Spirit World to deliver a message from her head brother and then died again.[213] (66 iii) & (66vi). One woman felt a painful prickling feeling when returning to her body (66v). Sellesa Snarr 1977, floated over her body on the bank and found it hard to believe what she was seeing. Her mother was giving her CPR. She entered her body and began choking and coughing (77vii). Carl DeHaven had a painful struggle which he described as agonizing and terrible to get back into his body (66viii).

(68) Pain ceases when spirit leaves the body and returns when spirit returns.

Experience of returning to body a) pain b) squeezing in c) disgust

Jedediah Grant told Heber C. Kimball, "I have been to the Spirit World two nights in succession and of all the dreads that ever came across me, the worse was to have to return to my body, though I had to do it."[214] (67ii).

Ella Jensen 1891 experienced pain on her return– "terrible suffering which she experienced when the spirit again entered the body. There was practically no pain on leaving the body in death, but the intense pain was almost unbearable in coming back to life."[215] (67vi).

Charles Lambert felt agony returning to his body (67v). Drummond felt the pain return and he awoke with a death certificate on his stomach. (62xvii) Wallace said that the pain hit him like a train upon his return to the body (67xiii).

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[213] May Neville.

[214] Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:135–36.
"Bruce Satterfield: 'the Postmortal Spirit World,'" BYU-Idaho, n.d., https://video.byui.edu/media/t/0_z444ztkb, (accessed 11/13/2024). Brent L. Top, "Death and the Spirit World: Latter-day Saint Teachings - BYU Speeches," BYU Speeches, March 15, 2021, https://speeches.byu.edu/talks/brent-l-top/thing-men-call-death-latter-day-saint-teachings-spirit-world/. Craig R. Lundahl, and Harold A Widdison. "The Mormon Explanation of Near-Death Experiences." *Anabiosis* June 1983, v.36, (1983): 97-106.

[215] Ella Jensen.

Stulz, 1921, was disappointed when ordered to return to his lifeless body which he likened to a torture chamber (67x).

Archie Graham, 1918, was returned to his bedroom and he saw his family in their beds, and he saw his body on the bed, and it appeared to be dead. The following describes his return:

I said to my guide, 'It looks hard to have to go back into that cold lifeless body after seeing all I have seen.' "'It doesn't only look hard, but it is hard,' he said. 'You don't have to go back, but if you want those blessings in the flesh, you must go back.' "'Yes, yes, I do want those blessings in the flesh, and I do want to go back at any cost.' I turned back to the body again to take it up. I touched it and shuddered. 'Oh,' I said, 'how can I, it's cold and clammy.' "I tried again to take it up, then cried out, 'I can't do it!' Being filled with the horror of the coldness of death, I cried out again, 'I can't do it, I can't do it.'" Still, Archie knew that this was something he had to do and so with positive determination, I forced myself back into my cold, lifeless body .... I was cold and stiff and could not move .... I could not even open my mouth or move my lips or utter a word .... I began to offer a silent prayer, trusting my Heavenly Father to hear it, and He did hear it. My body began to warm up."[216] (67ix).

(69) Miraculous healings.

Lovisa Mack Tuttle told her sister "The lord has healed me, both soul and body, raise me up and give me my clothes. I wish to get up." (68i).

ii**) Before 1964 Gordon Rees** said "**A lady died** in a hear operation – heart stopped beating. She went to heaven she saw her son who had died two years previously She was revived

[216] Archie J. Graham.

by doctors. She said the place she had visited was beautiful. Doctors had considered her dead for five minutes. They said her recovery is a miracle."[217]

Martin H. Pecks' testimony: "Testimony of cases where both Martin and his sons, were healed by the blessings, anointing, and laying on of hands performed by church members. Diseases or accidents caused many to die, but church elders saved many by rebuking the disease and calling upon the Lord for help. Many miracles occurred."[218] (68iii).

(70) Border

Idea of border balances that of a Veil. Since there is a Veil the need for a border between the Spirit World and a deeper heaven is unnecessary and does not fit with LDS cosmology. The idea that if a border is crossed one cannot return is not as common as in generic NDEs for this reason. The LDS border is crossing the Veil itself and the separation between the two realms is not as divided or distant as it is in Protestant or Roman Catholic Theology.

The border was not commonly reported, and only three examples are in my data.

"Dr. Wiltse says he danced in his glee. He traveled at a swift but pleasant rate of speed upward until he saw in front of him three prodigious rocks, blocking the road, when he was told that if he should pass them, he could no more return to the body (69i). He was prevented from continuing and returned to his body.

Schnakenberg perceived the border in the form of a gulf. "I saw a great gulf …. I followed him (the angel) until I reached the edge of the gulf [219] (69ii).

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[217] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6, Folder 9. Recounted by Gordon Rees who got it from Story from Faye Stevenson in 1964. She had heard from an acquaintance about the story.

[218] Marba Peck Hale, 1928-, *Marba P. Hale Papers.* Manuscript. MS 21208 (1000010223535) Folder 5. Remarkable Healings. Martin H. Peck's testimony of a number of remarkable cases of healing. Church History Library.

[219] Jennie Schnackenberg, 1896-. *Jennie Schnakenberg Letter, Sioux City Iowa to Bureau of Information.* Salt Lake City. Manuscript on Microfilm call # MS 12663 (100005015776) Church History Library.

Anna Smith saw her relatives across a river, but she could not cross it. (69ii) Another man was unable to cross a river to the other side and had to return because it was not his time (69iii).

REASONS TO RETURN.

(71) To do service be of help, support family and children on Earth. (Appendix 3)

Many reported that the main reason to return was to offer service and fulfil their life purpose to serve on Earth. (Tooley 70i) (Richardson 70ii) & (Rampton 70iii).

(72) Mission on Earth go back! Life Plan (Appendix 3).

main reason is that your work is not done on Earth, or someone needs you on Earth. As well has the Plan of Salvation for humankind, there is an induvial plan for each human, as Ralph Jensen explains (71xii).

Jacob Hamblin – asked his father why he could not enter the Spirit World fully "I then asked why I could not come. He answered "your work is not yet done. I attempted to speak about it again, but he motioned me away with his hand, and in a moment, I was back to this Earth." [220] (71i).

Abraham Kimball was informed that I must return and warn the people to repent, as my work on Earth was not yet done (71iii).

Josephine Christian Petersen Brewer Circa 1940s - "She is taken ill at church and taken to the hospital. Then her dead husband appears and explains to her that it is not her time to die, because she still has work to do on Earth."[221] (71iv).

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[220] Jacob Hamblin.

[221] Josephine Christian Petersen Brewer, 1878-1964. *Life Sketch.* Call # MS 12253 (1000050000202) Manuscript on Microfilm) 1-8. Church History Library.

Brian Glenn 1993 “He said he had a (life) plan, his parents had a plan, and everyone has a plan and must keep their promised (referring to promises and plans made before birth on Earth)”[222] (71vii).

Kim Rives, angel tells her "You need to get back in your body. It is dying, and your mission on Earth is not yet complete." [223]

Wayman: Clayne’s mission is now to awaken and heal others, the pain hurt, and division of life needs to be healed [224] (71xi).

Theology

> Death comes at a time when one’s Earthly mission is completed.
> No man will ever enter there until he has consummated his mission; for we have come here to be conformed to the likeness of God. He made us in the beginning in his own image. [225] (Joseph F. Smith)

Just a missionaries have a mission, all humans on Earth have their personal missions, often agreed before birth in the form of a promise or covenant.

(73) Apocalyptic visions / View of the future

Many experiences have very political aspects at the end of their books, especially linked to ideas about the Last Day. Trials and tribulations are seen as a cleansing of sin, and there is criticism of American society which is described as having lost its moral footing. There is an underlying ethical criticism of modern times.

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[222] Lloyd Gardner Glenn, ‘Free The Birdies,’ Manuscript on Microfilm. Call # MS 15490. (100000656891). Written by Lloyd Gardner Glenn 1994 for a High Council talk delivered in Lake Forest Ward Santa Margarita CA Stake. In 1993 - His 3-year-old son Brian had been crushed beneath the garage door and rushed to Mission Hospital. Miraculously he survived with no physical or neurological deficits. Church History Library.

[223] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 136-137.

[224] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding*, 357.

[225] Joseph F. Smith. *Gospel Doctrines*, 346.

Kenneth Ring described some NDErs as viewing the future of the Earth in a prophetic vision which contains knowledge of the future. There were five elements in the prophetic vision, 'geophysical changes, meteorological changes, supply and economic breakdowns, nuclear war and a new era of love and world peace.' [226]

Lundahl divides the future visions into two types: personal flash forwards (PF) and otherworld personal future revelation (OPFR).[227] These two types represent individual and communal aspects of the future. These kinds of ideas are not limited to Mormonism. The Bible contains many references to the End Times and apocalyptic prophecies have been common throughout history. The Mormon scriptures also talk about such times.[228] Lundahl however stresses that these trials will be followed by a time of universal love and peace.[229] Future visions might be shared by any type of spirit in the afterlife, such as a guide, a deceased relative or angel.

Personal Future

Martha Jane Boice 1840 returned shortly and predicted which of her children would die soon[230] (72i).

Harriet Ovard Lee 1860 **"**He told me the very year in which I should return, but neither the month nor the day." [i.e. her death date][231] (72ii).

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[226] Craig R. Lundahl, "Parallels between Near-Death Experience Prophetic Visions and Prophecies from the Bible and Mormon Holy Writ." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 17, no. 3 (1999): 193.

[227] Lundahl, Parallels between Near-Death, 193. Craig R. Lundahl, "Prophetic Revelations in Near-Death Experiences." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 19, no. 4 (2001): 233–39.

[228] See D&C 45. It refers to Earthquakes, fire, Earth trembling and social commotion. D&C, 88 - sun not giving light. the moon bathed in blood and seasonal changes. D&C 121:12 storms. D&C, 133. The second coming of Jesus.

[229] Craig R. Lundahl, "Parallels between Near-Death Experience Prophetic Visions and Prophecies from the Bible and Mormon Holy Writ." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 17, no. 3 (1999): 193.

[230] Martha Jane Boice.

[231] Harriet Ovard Lee.

The uncle of one of Mary Ann McAllister's roommates, 1962, reported "You must go back. First will come your son, your sister, and your wife." I cried out that I wished to stay but the calm commanding voice said for me to turn back. Her uncle recovered. A year later his son was killed in a tragic accident Then his sister died unexpectedly and two years later his wife died. The uncle lived several weeks after her death and then died of a heart attack quietly in his garden."[232] (future prediction) (69iii).

Similarly - 1954 "In about 1954, a brother was very ill and died. He saw his dead daughter in the other world. She told him to go back because it was not his turn to die. She said "Richard (her brother), grandmother, and then mother have to come first" He didn't want to go back to his body, but he went back. In three weeks, little Richard was killed, a month later grandmother died and after 2 years Mom died."[233] (72xi).

Earl Stowell c. 1893 'You will have children and will have certain assignments to fill there on Earth.' [234] (72iv).

Alternative future seen in great detail:

Peter E. Johnson 1898 was shown the future if he died but as a bird's eye view of the Earth. He was able to observe the events surrounding his death and funeral if he chose not to return to Earth, (Like Thos, Thomas's experience, he also saw how a message traveled along a telegraph line to announce his death if it did in fact occur in the near future.) (72v).

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[232] BYU Special Collections. Collection of supernatural and religious legends. Box 6, Folder 9. Recounted by Mary Ann McAllister 1962.

[233] BYU Special Collections. Collection of supernatural and religious legends. Box 6, Folder 9. Recounted by Jean Hurst 1964 from witness Kenneth Johnson, 43 Stake President of Grantsville stake UT. VTE occurred 10 years before 1964.

[234] Earl Stowell.

May Neville 1917 on her temporary return from the Spirit World told her mother she would live until she was very old.[235] (72vi).

Archie J. Graham 1918 is sent back and told he will be on Earth another 14 years [236] (72vi vii).

Henry Zollinger received an electric shock from a live wire, and then received information from deceased relatives about his personal future.[237] (72vi viii).

1932 Alvin Giles knew after his VTE that he had only a short time to live and asked his parents to take out insurance on him. "He appeared well but said he knew he would only be with his family a short time. He worked in the fields. A year later he got sick. He announced he wouldn't get better and wouldn't return from the hospital, and he waited to say goodbye to everyone in the family. Alvin died in hospital aged 16 in 1933." [238] (72x).

Susan Embry wrote in 1963 that "A woman who'd been sick, dead, and returned to life said she'd met relatives in the Spirit World who told her that her father would soon die. Shortly after her father died."[239] (72xii).

In 1971 a man was told in his VTE that he would become a patriarch and indeed he did. (72xiii)

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[235] May Neville.

[236] Archie J. Graham.

[237] Craig R. Lundahl, "Otherworld Personal Future Revelations in Near-Death Experiences." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 3 (1993): 171–79. Crowther *Life Everlasting*,111. Zollinger, Personal Communication, April 11, 1992. Henry Zollinger, "My Experience in the Spirit World" (unpublished manuscript). *Life*, 31. Crowther, Duane S., "What It Feels Like When a Spirit Leaves Its Body + Other Insights on Death and the Spirit World - LDS Living." LDS Living, May 26, 2018, https://www.ldsliving.com/what-it-feels-like-when-a-spirit-leaves-its-body-other-insights-on-death-and-the-spirit-world/s/88480.

[238] BYU Provo Special Collections. FA 02 Box 6 folder 7. Collection of supernatural and religious legends. *Passing through the Veil.* Verl L Giles whose father Leland Ray Giles from Arco Idaho told him from memory.

[239] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6, Folder 9. Recounted by Susan Embry 1962.

Fenimore was given a glimpse of how her suicide affected her family and loved ones had she not survived. 'I was given a glimpse of their future… By abandoning my Earthly responsibilities, I would influence my children, my oldest son in particular, to make choices that would lead him away from his divine purpose. [240] (72v).

Call is shown a hologram of the future if she didn't return which helped her decide to return." (72vi).

National and World Future

Jesus told Joseph Smith, "I will reveal myself from heaven with power and great glory … and dwell in righteousness with men on Earth a thousand years, and the wicked shall not stand"[241] What is positive however, compared to some other forms of apocalyptic vision, is that peace and joy will come to the Earth and the planet will not be destroyed. In fact, the Earth will be blessed, and Zion will be established here.[242]

Modern

One of the key books in this genre is John Pontius' Visions of Glory and the experiences of 'Spencer.'[243] It has been a very influential book in popular culture, as well as controversial. It has had an impact not only on popular debate but also in the political arena. Grant Underwood

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[240] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness.* 110.

[241] D&C 29:11, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/29?lang=eng&id=11#p11. In an 1830 revelation Jesus talks to Joseph about the Millennium and the Last Days, Resurrection and final judgement.

Also see chapters 43, 44 and 45 of Joseph F. Smith. *Gospel Principles*, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-principles/chapter-44-the-second-coming-of-jesus-christ?lang=eng.

[242] Doctrine and Covenants 45:66–67; 57:1–3; Articles of Faith 1:10. D&C 57:3. (1931 revelation to Joseph Smith that Zion will be in Independence MO.

[243] John M. Pontius, *Visions of Glory: One Man's Astonishing Account of the Last Days* (CFI, an imprint of Cedar Fort, Inc., 2012).

and Christoper J. Blythe have documented the millenarian and strong and influential [244] apocalyptic strains of Mormonism that have roots in the 19th century and before. Blythe points out that this apocalyptic strain ordered the cosmology of heaven and Earth placing humankind within its narrative in a Mormon universe.

Rowe said, "*As* I continued to look into "The Window of Heaven," I witnessed many national events that have since taken place, as well as several that will still happen in the near future.

The nation was still experiencing economic trouble and there were small-scale natural disasters, but for the most part there wasn't anything to signal major problems ahead." This is more controversial and ties her in with Chad Daybell and his apocalyptic doomsday cultish group what went far beyond typical LDS beliefs.[245] (72xvi).

Durham is famous for her grand apocalyptic visions that some have criticized as being embellishments. She foresaw a great destruction on Earth, Earth changes, floods storms and Earthquakes and the destruction of coastal areas of the US. Her visions have a political twist [246] (72ix).

Menet has visions of the future of the Earth…wars, collapse of tall buildings falling in New York. Economic collapse, disease. People flee to one of two dozen cities of light. An Earthquake breaks North America apart.[247] I see the future She saw apocalyptic visions of war, disease pandemics, 911 attacks, breakdown of society, famine, cities of light and safety. (There

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[244] Christopher James Blythe, *Terrible Revolution: Latter-day Saints and the American Apocalypse* (Oxford University Press, 2020). Grant Underwood, *The Millenarian World of Early Mormonism* (University of Illinois Press, 1993).

[245] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 111.

[246] Durham, *I Stand All Amazed,* 53-54.

[247] Sarah Lanelle Menet, *There Is No Death: The Extraordinary True Experience of Sarah LaNelle Menet* (Mountain Top Publishing. 2006), 64, 73.

will be 20 or 30 safe cities in the West mostly.) The light came from the prayers of those there. Nuclear missiles fired on US and invasion my Russian and Chinese armies. There are many Earthquakes as the Earth cleanses herself. US cities devastated. Floods. USA split in half. Great Lakes empty into Gulf of Mexico. then a giant fireball hits the Earth[248] (72x).

Freeman said, "They are deeply saddened to see the rampant wickedness in our country today.' If Americans do not start living righteously and put God back in, then the country will be taken from them:' I was told that if we do not put God back into all aspects of our life, whether it be in our own separate life or as a nation, we will not be a free nation anymore, and the heavens will weep."[249] (72xvi xii).

Daybell followed a prompting to move to Rexburg Idaho, He believes it is a chosen area where there will be a City of Light during the comping tribulations.[250] Although this particular book contained only hints at apocalyptic content, his other works, and lectures were focused on this topic of preparing for the end days (72xvi).

Richardson is told Zion will soon appear on Earth.[251] One of the conditions for Lance to return was to share his message about what he had learned in the Spirit World and that Jesus Christ is redeemer. Also, to share a warning that America is in moral danger and people must serve each other (72xvi xiv).

Older

James G. Marsh 1838 "He saw bloody wars among all people accompanied with earthquakes, pestilences, and famines. And he saw all the cities of the nation's crumble and fall

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[248] Menet, *There Is No Death*, 67-73.
[249] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 103.
[250] Daybell, *Living on the Edge,* 175-178.
[251] Richardson, *The Message,* 91, 115,106-108.

to rise no more. He saw the church of Christ ready to ascend on high, and when they were ready, Zion from above hovered in sight, accompanied by the Lord and all the holy prophets. The church on beholding them, arose triumphantly and met them in the expanse above. "These are a few of the things which he related of his vision to his parents, suffice it to say, he saw the beginning and end of all things and he never after appeared to be afraid of death." [252] (72vi).

viii) 1896 Jennie Schnackenberg **"**She then saw many miles of people seated along a pathway and had apocalyptic visions."[253]

Vision of Patriarch Charles D. Evans in 1893 Volume 15 of the *Contributor Magazine*- later known as *The Improvement Era*.

He is shown a vision of the future of the USA which "had reached an unparalleled prosperity, wealth abounded…" but then the vision turns sour. "Monuments erected to perpetuate the names of the noble and brave were ruthlessly destroyed by combustibles." "A foreign power invaded the nation which from every human indication it appears would seize the government and supplant it…" but all ends well "The struggle was fiercely contested but the Stars and Stripes floated in the breeze and bidding defiance to all opposition waved proudly over the land…. [254] (72vii).

Comment

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[252] Obituary," *Elders 'Journal* (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

[253] Jennie Schnackenberg, 1896-, *Jennie Schnakenberg Letter, Sioux City Iowa to Bureau of Information.* Salt Lake City. Manuscript on Microfilm call # MS 12663 (100005015776) Church History Library.

[254] Springville UT patriarch contributor Aug 1894 no. 10, vol 15, 638-641. (Located at, https://archive.org/details/contributor1510eng). In 1893 Volume 15 of the *Contributor Magazine*- later known as *The Improvement Era*.

Craig Lundahl called such future visions OPFR (otherworld personal future revelation).[255] He noted that this future precognition happened in the life review. It sems reasonable to me that if the other side is a realm with no space and time, and complete knowledge, that seeing the past present and future now, is understandable. The future can also be revealed by guides and relatives. They do seem to have knowledge about whether the visitor can stay or has to return and have access to the expected timeline of their Earthly lives. He notes that such visions of the future are not limited to Mormons.[256]

Mormon scriptures and teachings are full of future times teachings related to Christ's second coming, the millennium and resurrection.[257]

Note on the resurrection

In LDS doctrine there is not one resurrection but different persons and groups being resurrected at different times.[258] Like the physicality of the Spirit World, the resurrection is literally a physical phenomenon, and bodies will be perfected, free from pain and disabilities.

It is a literally physical resurrection. All the descendants of Adam are promised the possibility of redemption.[259]

Elder Dallin H. Oaks taught that: "What a comfort to know that all who have been disadvantaged in life from birth defects, from mortal injuries, from disease, or from the natural deterioration of old age will be resurrected in 'proper and perfect frame.' …[260]

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[255] Craig R. Lundahl, "Otherworld Personal Future Revelations in Near-Death Experiences." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 3 (1993): 171–79. 171.

[256] Lundahl, Otherworld Personal, 171. (Lundahl says that prophetic visions which are often apocalyptic or relate to a new era of peace and love, have been reported by a small number of experiencers and are documented by Ring (Ring, 1988) and by Melvin Morse (Morse and Perry 1988 & 1992).

[257] Celestial Glory D&C 76:50–70; 88:96–98, Telestial glory (see D&C 76:85; 88:100–101)., D&C 88:99). Second Resurrection (D&C 76:17), Sons of Perdition (see D&C 76:43–48; 88:102).

[258] D.&C. 76:50–80; 88:95–99. Also, *Doctrinal New Testament Commentary,* 3 vols. [1971–73], 1:196.

[259] Moses 5:10 All Adam's descendants can achieve redemption

[260] In Conference Report, Apr. 2000, 16–17; or *Ensign,* May 2000, 14.

The first general resurrection of the righteous occurs during the Second Coming of Christ,[261] followed by The Millenium of a thousand years. This will commence with the righteous risen from their graves being part of this kingdom on Earth.[262] Next the worthy of the terrestrial order will be resurrected, for they can be part of the millennium. [263]

The atonement of Jesus Christ allows our salvation and resurrection.[264]

I. AFTER THE VTE

Often amnesia on return…don't remember everything because interferes with agency. Other times more information emerges in dreams and continued visitations. Memory returns. Certainly, there is amnesia of the premortal life and memory of this returns in stages in the Spirit World.

(74) Verification/ veridical event

One aspect of VTEs that lends argument to their truth according to believers, is that when out of body or in the Spirit World, experiencers are given information or witness events which they could not normally have access to. This is very common also in generic NDEs. Typically, conversations in other places are witnessed by the comatose or nearly dead experiencers, and later after recovery this information is shared and found to be correct. For example, Ella Jensen 1891, saw a child in the Spirit World that she did not know had died whilst she was ill. When she recovered and only then did she find out the child had died (73iv). Mr. Bertrand, (1892), saw the actions of his guide on the mountain and was able to challenge him about these actions later on.

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[261] Alma 40:16, 20; D&C 133:54–55

[262] D&C 88:97–98; D&C 76:68–69

[263] *Doctrines of Salvation,* comp. Bruce R. McConkie, 3 vols. [1954–56], 2:295–97).

[264] Doctrine and Covenants 29:26. By Elder LeGrand Richards, "What After Death?," October 2, 1974, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1974/10/what-after-death?lang=eng.

The guide went forth on the right and not the left as he had promised. Bertrand had seen events from his out of body position in the sky above them all.

Future events were made known to some, such as Heber Hale foreseeing a man's death (73vi), and Walter Monson's knowledge of the order of death of his family members (73vii). Soldier Robert Aimes was able to provide battleground information about his dead colleagues, information he could not have known unless his spirit was really like a drone hovering over the scene (73viii).

W.W. Merrill had a shared death experience with a woman who he let in the Spirit World, and they both recovered and met again on Earth where both remembered their Spirit World meeting (73x).

Many remembered their surgeries, when they were anesthetized or unconscious, when they were out of body, from a 'drone-like view' above the surgeons and were able to describe this later in detail. (Carl DeHaven 73xi) & (Elane Durham 73xii). This kind of incident is common in generic NDEs.

Impact/A new perspective on life

i) Hugh Nibley "[Absolute knowledge of the afterlife] gives me a great relief, so that's why I don't take this very seriously down here. We're just sort of dabbling around, playing around, being tested for our moral qualities…We can forgive, and we can repent."[265]

ii) Elder David B. Haight – "I cannot begin to convey to you the deep impact that these scenes have confirmed upon my soul. I sense their eternal meaning and realize that "nothing in the entire plan of salvation compares in any way in importance with that most transcendent of all events, the atoning sacrifice of our Lord." [266]

(75) Gifts and dreams/no Veil

[265] Hugh Nibley.
[266] Elder David B. Haight.

Chad Daybell believed that he had ‘gifts’ and he believed he was ‘special’ almost like a prophet**.** “He did have an after effect of the experience…he began to sense disembodied spirits and receiving direct promptings and impressions to keep him out of danger. “In retrospect I believe when I hit the water, and my spirit exited my body my personal Veil was torn open near my forehead and never sealed back up properly… After high school he was less busy, and he became more aware of this torn Veil, and he became aware of another realm.” (74i). This led to the development of his dangerous ideas, his going beyond the usual constraints of Church boundaries and authority, and eventually his criminal activities. This pseudo-doctrine of a personal ripped Veil is echoed by Mendenhall, whose work was used by Daybell’s sect (74ii). She claimed it gave her prophetic abilities and visions of future events, even though she had no priesthood authority as a woman. Other extraordinary abilities were reported by Call and Olsen (74v) & (74iv). Call became very intuitive and able to tap into the feelings and emotions of others and reported some new psychic abilities. Olsen reported having the ability to read people’s characters intuitively after his VTE. Rowe received prophetic dreams about the future and Moe received dream messages from her spirit ancestors (74vi) & (74vii). Many people report having new psychic abilities after generic NDEs. It is like a communication channel is opened up and their awareness of the other side remains.

(76) Lost fear of death expressed

This is common both in Mormon VTEs and Generic NDEs

James A Randall 1961 wrote about Sheldon Parks in 1955, a member of his ward, who had a heart condition in an Arizona hospital who was near death, and later had a brief recovery. Parks said: “I shall never fear death again.” Randall added that Parks told him that he “awaits with anticipation and satisfaction the time when he will be permitted to re-enter and enjoy the

peaceful and beautiful surroundings and environment of the world, I was permitted to gain a glimpse of. He soon passed away."[267] (75i).

(77) Joining or leaving the Church.

It is usual for a major change in spirituality and allegiance to occur after a dramatic spiritual experience. Some atheists have even embraced faith afterwards, e.g., Eben Alexander.

i) Heroine Randall 1830 accepted the full faith after her VTE

ii) Frederick Babble 1920 [He became LDS because of his VTE]

iii) Herman Stulz 1921 When Herman had his second experience, he remembered promising to accept the gospel when he came to Earth and to do Temple work for his ancestors." Herman testified that what the LDS faith taught as doctrine was true. He had previously read the Book of Mormon and his VTE confirmed it was true for him.

iv) Tooley became active again his wife and he were sealed in the Temple and completed all their ordinances. "sense of urgency" "not having enough time to complete things."[268]

v) Elane Durham and Jane Moe, led to join the church given that they found church teachings compatible with their VTEs. Amy Call, however, left the church. Rowe was excommunicated. There is always comings and goings and fluidity in the relationship between the church and members. Some hold Temple recommends, others don't but attend meetings in the chapels, others become inactive. Others write about their VTEs and do not highlight LDS affiliation, such as Betty Eadie.

(78) Impression of the spirit to share VTE

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[267] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6, Folder 9. Recounted by James A Randall May 12, 1961. Sheldon, 1961, Bishop.

[268] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 2147.

In the 19th century people in a close-knit community were less reluctant to share testimonies of spiritual experiences within the group. There is still the perception in Mormon circles that these experiences are personal and should not be broadcast widely unless there is an ethical reason to do so. This explains why many Mormons on social media platforms hide their church affiliations and refer to themselves simply as Christians. This is in part to avoid ridicule and rejection from other denominations, but also sometimes to avoid criticism from the church authorities.

i) Harriet Ovard Lee 1860 Many other things he told which he commanded me not to tell to a living soul.[269]

ii) Eliza Ursenbach died in 1872 said 'But let me admonish you to speak with extreme caution of things you have seen in this Spirit World.'[270]

iii) 1932 Alvin Giles was reluctant to share his experience. [271]

iv) Ricks was encouraged by the spirit to write down this sacred experience in 2012. [272]

Some VTErs are allowed to share by the Holy Ghost and others are told to keep experiences sacred.

v) Mendenhall "The Lord showed me many more things that I can't share right now." [273]

vi) Jensen was instructed to share on the other hand.[274]

(79) Memory of the VTE remains clear, vibrant, and influential.

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[269] Harriet Ovard Lee.
[270] Eliza Ursenbach.
[271] BYU Provo Special Collections. FA 02 Box 6 folder 7 Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. *Passing through the Veil.* Verl L Giles whose father Leland Ray Giles from Arco Idaho told him from memory.
[272] Ricks, *Remember: A Little*, ix.
[273] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 49.
[274] Jensen, *Taught by Christ*, x.

Lorenzo Dow Young - "The memory of this dream is still clear and distinct, after the lapse of over fifty years with their many changes."[275] (78i)

(80) Consistency of stories over time (Appendix 3 p.136)

Brian Glenn 1993 Even though he was only three at the time of the accident "His story never changed."[276] (79i)

[275] Lorenzo Dow Young.

[276] Lloyd Gardner Glenn, 'Free The Birdies'. Manuscript on Microfilm. Call # MS 15490 (100000656891) Written by Lloyd Gardner Glenn 1994 for a High Council talk delivered in Lake Forest Ward Santa Margarita CA Stake. In 1993 - His 3-year-old son Brian had been crushed beneath the garage door and rushed to Mission Hospital. Miraculously he survived with no physical or neurological deficits. Church History Library.

Appendix 4

The Complete Data Organized by the 80 Elements, the Prophet-Presidents, and Church Leaders

I decided to make the testimonies of Joseph Smith Jr. and other church leaders a separate category for theological reasons. Their visions were particularly important in establishing the foundations of the 'true faith'. The 'restored Church' is founded upon direct experience and communication with the divine, and on the receiving of knowledge and revelation from the other side of the Veil.

JOSEPH SMITH JR. 1820 PRIMARY AND SECONDARY SOURCES.

1) The First Vision in the Grove – multiple versions.[1]

This is the most important vision I believe, in the life of Joseph Smith. According to Joseph Smith, his First Vision of God the Father and Jesus Christ occurred in the spring of 1820, when he was 14 years old. He was praying in a grove of trees near his home in Manchester, New York, when he was visited by two personages. One was identified as God the Father, and the other as Jesus Christ. Smith reported that they told him that all the churches were wrong and that he was to be the instrument in restoring the true gospel to the Earth. The First Vision is a central event in Latter Day Saint belief. It is seen as evidence of Smith's divine calling as a prophet and the founder of the Latter-day Saint Church. There is no independent verification of Joseph

[1] "Chapter 1: The First Vision: The Father and the Son Appear to Joseph Smith," January 1, 2011, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-joseph-smith/chapter-1?lang=eng.

He was not taken seriously by others, including preachers. (see: Joseph Smith History 1:21-26, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1?lang=eng&id=21-26#p21) and "Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," The Joseph Smith Papers. The Church Historian's Press, n.d., accessed November 12, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-first-vision.

Smith's First Vision. It is based on his own accounts, which were written or recorded many years after the events they describe. As such, it is possible that some of the details of these accounts may have been misremembered or embellished. However, the First Vision is a significant event in Latter Day Saint history and has been the subject of much scholarly debate. Some scholars have argued that the First Vision is a genuine religious experience, while others have argued that it is a fabrication. The four variant accounts however are consistent and just differ in emphasis and some details.

SOURCES: *The History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints* is an official history of the Latter-Day Saint Church that was written by Smith and his successors. The first volume of the history includes an account of the First Vision.[2] The Pearl of Great Price. This is a book of scripture that includes an account of the First Vision. The account in the Pearl of Great Price is based on Smith's 1838 history.[3] The most well-known version of the two published during his lifetime is found in the Pearl of Great Price. The two unpublished are found in his autobiography and a journal.[4]

1) Joseph Smith's 1832 history. This is the earliest known account of the First Vision. It was written by Smith in 1832, in an unpublished autobiography, and it is included later in the Joseph Smith Papers. [5] Only Jesus is mentioned. [see Smith, Joseph. "History of Joseph Smith." 1832. Joseph Smith Papers, Documents, Volume 1: 1805–1832. ed. Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew

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[2] Joseph Smith, et al, History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. 7 vols (Deseret Book, 1971).

[3] Joseph Smith, Pearl of Great Price, (Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013).

[4] "First Vision Accounts," January 1, 2016, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/gospel-topics-essays/first-vision-accounts?lang=eng.

[5] History, circa Summer 1832, p. 1, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 13, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-circa-summer-1832/1?p=1. "Accounts of Joseph Smith's First Vision," The Joseph Smith Papers. The Church Historian's Press., accessed November 13, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/site/accounts-of-the-first-vision?p=1&highlight=first%20vision.

J. Grow, and Richard Lyman Bushman. (Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012. 1–3.)]

> At about the age of twelve years, my mind became seriously impressed with regard to the all-important concerns for the welfare of my immortal soul, … Thus, from the age of twelve years to fifteen I pondered many things in my heart concerning the situation of the world of mankind, the contentions and divisions, the wickedness and abominations, and the darkness which pervaded the minds of mankind. My mind became exceedingly distressed… Therefore, I cried unto the Lord for mercy…while in the attitude of calling upon the Lord, in the sixteenth year of my age, a pillar of light above the brightness of the sun at noonday came down from above and rested upon me. I was filled with the spirit of God, and the Lord opened the heavens upon me and I saw the Lord… Behold, I am the Lord of glory. I was crucified for the world, that all those who believe on my name may have eternal life… My soul was filled with love, and for many days I could rejoice with great joy. The Lord was with me, but I could find none that would believe the heavenly vision. Nevertheless, I pondered these things in my heart.[6]

2) 1835 account as told to Robert Matthews, who visited Kirtland, Ohio. It is recorded in Joseph's journal. This version contains angels as well as Heavenly Father and Jesus.

> I called upon the Lord for the first time in the place above stated. Or in other words, I made a fruitless attempt to pray; my tongue seemed to be swollen in my mouth, so that I could not utter. …I kneeled again. My mouth was opened and my tongue liberated, and I called on the Lord in mighty prayer. A pillar of fire appeared above my head. It presently rested down upon me and filled me with joy unspeakable. A personage appeared in the midst of this pillar of flame, which was spread all around and yet nothing consumed. Another personage soon appeared, like unto the first. He said unto me, "Thy sins are forgiven thee." He testified unto me that Jesus Christ is the son of God. And I saw many angels in this vision. I was about fourteen years old when I received this first communication. [7]

3) Joseph Smith's 1838 history. This is a more detailed account of the First Vision and found in The Pearl of Great Price. It was written by Smith in 1838, and it is also included in the

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[6] "Circa Summer 1832 History," January 1, 2020, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/first-vision-accounts/1832-account?lang=eng.

[7] Journal, 1835–1836, p. 23, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 13, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/24?p=24. Journal, 1835–1836, p. 24, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 13, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/journal-1835-1836/25. History, 1834–1836, p. 120, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 13, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/history-1834-1836/124?p=124. "Journal, 9–11 November 1835," January 1, 2020, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/first-vision-accounts/1835-account?lang=eng.

Joseph Smith Papers.[8] First published in 1842 in the *Times and Seasons,* this account is very detailed, and reflection of the experience is evident.

> I was ready to sink into despair and abandon myself to destruction—not to an imaginary ruin, but to the power of some actual being from the unseen world, who had such marvelous power as I had never before felt in any being—just at this moment of great alarm, I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me. It no sooner appeared than I found myself delivered from the enemy which held me bound. When the light rested upon me I saw two Personages, whose brightness and glory defy all description, standing above me in the air. One of them spake unto me, calling me by name and said, pointing to the other—*This is My Beloved Son. Hear Him!* My object in going to inquire of the Lord was to know which of all the sects was right, that I might know which to join… I was answered that I must join none of them, for they were all wrong; and the Personage who addressed me said that all their creeds were an abomination in his sight; that those professors were all corrupt; … He again forbade me to join with any of them; and many other things did he say unto me, which I cannot write at this time. When I came to myself again, I found myself lying on my back, looking up into heaven. When the light had departed, I had no strength; but soon recovering in some degree, I went home. [9]

4) Joseph Smith's 1842 account. This is a brief account of the First Vision that was published in the Times and Seasons in 1842. The Wentworth Letter. This is a letter that Smith wrote in 1842 to John Wentworth, the editor of the Chicago Democrat, who was inquiring about the Church. The letter includes a brief account of the First Vision.[10]

Wentworth Letter version:

> I retired to a secret place in a grove and began to call upon the Lord. While fervently engaged in supplication, my mind was taken away from the objects with which I was surrounded, and I was enwrapped in a heavenly vision and saw two glorious personages who exactly resembled each other in features and likeness, surrounded with a brilliant light which eclipsed the sun at noonday. They told me that all religious denominations

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[8] Joseph Smith, "History of Joseph Smith." 1832. Joseph Smith Papers, Documents, Volume 1: 1805–1832. ed. Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, and Richard Lyman Bushman. Salt Lake City: Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2012. 1–3,17.

[9] JS History, 1838–1856, vol. A-1, pp. 2–3. and 'Pearl of Great Price 2013 Joseph Smith History. Ch. 1 16-20, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1?lang=eng&id=5-20#p5.

[10] Joseph Smith, "Church History [Wentworth Letter]." Times and Seasons 3, no. 11 (March 1, 1842): 706–7. Joseph Smith, "The First Vision." Times and Seasons 3, no. 11 (March 1, 1842): 70–71. JS, "Church History," Times and Seasons, 1 Mar. 1842, 3:706–707 https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/first-vision-accounts/1842-account?lang=eng.

were believing in incorrect doctrines and that none of them was acknowledged of God as his church and kingdom. And I was expressly commanded to "go not after them," at the same time receiving a promise that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me.[11]

5) THE PILLAR OF LIGHT

"I saw a pillar of light exactly over my head, above the brightness of the sun, which descended gradually until it fell upon me.[12]

Other versions A pillar of fire appeared above my head. It presently rested down upon me and filled me with joy unspeakable.[13]

6) OTHER VERSIONS

Israel Daniel Rupp's Version describes the moment when Smith was visited by the personage who identified himself as God the Father. It is an updated version of the Wentworth Letter.[14]

> I retired to a secret place in a grove and began to call upon the Lord, while fervently engaged in supplication my mind was taken away from the objects with which I was surrounded, and I was enwrapped in a [p. 706] heavenly vision and saw two glorious personages who exactly resembled each other in features, and likeness, surrounded with a brilliant light which eclipsed the sun at noon-day. They told me that all religious denominations were believing in incorrect doctrines, and that none of them was acknowledged of God as his church and kingdom. And I was expressly

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[11] From the "Wentworth Letter," *History of the Church*, 4:536 March 1, 1842,https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-joseph-smith/chapter-38?lang=eng. "Joseph Smith's Accounts of the First Vision. The Church Historian's Press.," accessed November 13, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/articles/primary-accounts-of-first-vision.

[12] *History of the Church,* 4:536, https://history.churchofjesuschrist.org/content/the-first-vision?lang=en.g. Joseph Smith prepared four accounts of his First Vision, recorded in 1832, 1835, 1838 (now in the Pearl of Great Price), and 1842. https://rsc.byu.edu/exploring-first-vision/earliest-documented-accounts-joseph-smiths-first-vision.

[13] Joseph Smith Journal 9 November 1835 recounted his First Vision to Robert Matthews, a visitor to Kirtland, Ohio. https://scriptures.info/scriptures/tc/section/116.

[14] "Joseph Smith's Accounts of the First Vision. The Church Historian's Press.," accessed November 13, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/articles/primary-accounts-of-first-vision. "Latter Day Saints," 1844, p. 404, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 13, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/latter-day-saints-1844/1?p=1. An updated version of this history was prepared for a collection of essays about religions in the United States, published in 1844. The account of Joseph Smith's vision was a word-for-word copy of the 1842 version.

commanded to “go not after them,” at the same time receiving a promise that the fulness of the gospel should at some future time be made known unto me.[15]

7) VISIONS OF ANGELS AND MORONI

According to Joseph Smith's account, he met the angel Moroni four times between 1823 and 1827.

The first time was in the spring of 1823, when Moroni appeared to Smith and told him about the golden plates buried in a hill near his home in Manchester, New York. Moroni said that Smith was the one chosen to translate the plates and bring them forth to the world. (The earliest known source for Joseph Smith's account of meeting Moroni in 1823 is his own 1838 history, which was published posthumously. In this history, Smith writes that he met Moroni for the first time in the spring of 1823, when he was 14 years old. Moroni told Smith about the golden plates buried in a hill near his home in Manchester, New York, and said that Smith was the one chosen to translate them.[16]

The 1838 history is not the only source for Smith's account of meeting Moroni. There are also several contemporary accounts, including those of Smith's family and friends. These accounts generally corroborate Smith's own account, although there are some minor differences.[17]

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[15] “Church History,” 1 March 1842, p. 706, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 13, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/church-history-1-march-1842/1.

JS, “Church History,” in Times and Seasons, *1 Mar. 1842, vol. 3, no. 9, 706–710.*

[16] There is no record of the exact number of visits from Moroni, but 22 have been documented (see H. D. Peterson, “Moroni—Joseph Smith’s Tutor,” *Ensign,* Jan. 1992, 22–29, Footnote 11).

[17] Joseph Smith, "History of Joseph Smith," 1838, in The Joseph Smith Papers, Documents, Volume 2: 1823–1838, ed. Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013), 20–27.

The second time was in September 1823, when Moroni gave Smith the Urim and Thummim, a set of ancient instruments that would be used to translate the plates.[18]

The third time was in June 1824, when Moroni allowed Smith to see the golden plates for the first time.[19]

The fourth and final time was in September 1827, when Moroni gave Smith the plates and allowed him to begin translating them.[20]

a) "One month before Joseph Smith reports having received the Golden Plates from Moroni, he writes to relate an experience, accompanied by spiritual confirmation of faith"[21] Smith writes to Josiah Stowell and in this letter, Joseph Smith describes an experience he had on the evening of 16 August 1823, in which he was visited by an angel who told him that he would be the instrument in bringing forth the Book of Mormon. Smith writes that he was "filled with the spirit of God" and that he felt "a great desire to serve God" after this experience. The timing of this letter is significant because it is one month before Smith's first reported encounter with the angel Moroni, who is said to have given him the golden plates from which the Book of Mormon was translated. The letter provides evidence that Smith had already begun to have spiritual experiences that prepared him for his later role as the prophet of the Book of Mormon.

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[18] Joseph Smith, History of Joseph Smith, 20–27.
[19] Joseph Smith, History of Joseph Smith, 20–27.
[20] Joseph Smith, History of Joseph Smith, 20–27.
[21] Joseph Smith, "Letter to Josiah Stowell," 17 August 1823, in The Joseph Smith Papers, Documents, Volume 1: 1820–1823, ed. Ronald K. Esplin, Matthew J. Grow, and Richard Lyman Bushman (Church History Department, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2013), 237–38.

Joseph Smith wrote in a letter that Joseph Smith wrote to his close friend, Sidney Rigdon, on February 19, 1832. The letter is now known as the "Letter to Sidney Rigdon" and is included in the Joseph Smith Papers.:

> "Can you believe me when I tell you that even I was permitted to rejoice with joy unspeakable unutterable consolation that my faith was of the true kind. I saw heaven opened and oh the grandeur, oh the goodness, the sweetness! My soul burned with celestial ardour and my very body seemed to be agreeably affected by a supernatural infusion. Brother we shall go to heaven when we die. I see plainly! The path we have been pursuing especially this four- or five-months past will most certainly conduct us to glory."[22]

Versions of Moroni's visit

There are at least 10 different versions of the story of Moroni's first visit to Joseph Smith on September 23, 1823. These versions were recorded by Joseph Smith himself, his family members, and other early Latter-day Saints. The earliest version of the story was recorded by Joseph Smith in 1832. This version is known as the "1832 History." In this version, Moroni appears to Joseph Smith as a "white and shining angel" and tells him about the buried plates of gold. The differences between the versions of the story can be attributed to a number of factors, including Joseph Smith's own imperfect memory of the events; the way that the story was retold by different people; the different purposes for which the stories were recorded.

From Church History 1 March 1842 Visit of the Angel

> On the evening of the 21st of September, A. D. 1823, while I was praying unto God, and endeavoring to exercise faith in the precious promises of scripture on a sudden a light like that of day, only of a far purer and more glorious appearance, and brightness burst into the room, indeed the first sight was as though the house was filled with consuming fire; the appearance produced a shock that affected the whole body; in a moment a personage stood before me surrounded with a glory yet greater than that with which I

[22] Joseph Smith, "Letter to Sidney Rigdon," February 19, 1832, in The Joseph Smith Papers, Volume 2: Revelations and Translations, Part 1: Including the Book of Commandments and Related Manuscripts, ed. Royal Skousen, Matthew J. Grow, and Richard L. Bushman (Church Historian's Press, 2011), 241.

was already surrounded. This messenger proclaimed himself to be an angel of God sent to bring the joyful tidings, that the covenant which God made with ancient Israel was at hand to be fulfilled, that the preparatory work for the second coming of the Messiah was speedily to commence; that the time was at hand for the gospel, in all its fulness to be preached in power, unto all nations that a people might be prepared for the millennial reign.

I was informed that I was chosen to be an instrument in the hands of God to bring about some of his purposes in this glorious dispensation.

I was also informed concerning the aboriginal inhabitants of this country, and shown who they were, and from whence they came; a brief sketch of their origin, progress, civilization, laws, governments, of their righteousness and iniquity, and the blessings of God being finally withdrawn from them as a people was made known unto me: I was also told where there was deposited some plates on which were engraven an abridgement of the records of the ancient prophets that had existed on this continent. The angel appeared to me three times the same night and unfolded the same things. After having received many visits from the angels of God unfolding the majesty, and glory of the events that should transpire in the last days, on the morning of the 22d of September A. D. 1827, the angel of the Lord delivered the records into my hands.

These records were engraven on plates which had the appearance of gold, each plate was six inches wide and eight inches long and not quite so thick as common tin. They were filled with engravings, in Egyptian characters and bound together in a volume, as the leaves of a book with three rings running through the whole.[23]

Book of Mormon Version.[24]

Light feet don't touch the floor loose white robe white and brilliant – countenance like lightning – Moroni – told about Golden Plates – Urim and Thummim – three seer stones to be used to translate the plates - instantly I saw, as it were, a conduit open right up into heaven, and he ascended till he entirely disappeared, and the room was left as it had been before this heavenly light had made its appearance. – Then he returns – he repeats the message then adds a warning about Earthly judgment and famine sword and pestilence to come to the Earth – then he goes again – then he returns and leaves for the third time. [in the Book of Mormon ix Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith.[25]

On the evening of the 21st September, A. D. 1823, while I was praying unto God and endeavouring to exercise faith in the precious promises of scripture, on a sudden a light like that of day, only of a far purer and more glorious appearance and brightness, burst into the room; indeed the first sight was as though the house was filled with consuming fire. The appearance produced a shock that affected the whole body. In a moment a

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[23] "Church History," 1 March 1842, p. 707, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 13, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/church-history-1-march-1842/2.

JS, "Church History," in Times and Seasons, 1 Mar. 1842, vol. 3, no. 9, 706–710.

[24] "Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith," n.d., https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/js?lang=eng., is a similar version.

[25] "Testimony of the Prophet Joseph Smith," (Israel Daniel Rupp Version), n.d., https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/bofm/js?lang=eng, (accessed 11/13/2024).

> personage stood before me surrounded with a glory yet greater than that with which I was already surrounded. 8 This messenger proclaimed himself to be an angel of God, sent to bring the joyful tidings, that the covenant which God made with ancient Israel was at hand to be fulfilled; that the preparatory work for the second coming of the Messiah was speedily to commence; that the time was at hand for the gospel in all its fulness to be preached in power, unto all nations, that a people might be prepared for the millennial reign.I was informed that I was chosen to be an instrument in the hands of God to bring about some of his purposes in this glorious dispensation... The angel appeared to me three times the same night and unfolded the same things. After having received many visits from the angels of God, unfolding the majesty and glory of the events that should transpire in the last days, on the morning of the 22d of September, A. D. 1827, the angel of the Lord delivered the records into my hands. [26]
>
> b) Tunnel aspect - When Moroni leaves him' instantly I saw, as it were, a conduit open

right up into heaven, and he ascended till he entirely disappeared.'[27] This passage with its emphasis on divine light and the conduit reminds the reader of the tunnel between the worlds that VTE experiencers often report.[28]

8) Joseph Smith The Vision of the Tree of Life (1827): In this vision, Smith saw a tree of life and was taught about the principles of salvation. There is no specific citation for The Vision of the Tree of Life (1827) because it is not a well-known vision that Joseph Smith Jr. reported. It is mentioned in a few sources, but there is no detailed account of it. One source that mentions The Vision of the Tree of Life is the book "History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day

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[26] "Latter Day Saints," 1844, p. 405, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 13, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/latter-day-saints-1844/2. *JS, "Latter Day Saints," pp. 404–410 in* Israel Daniel Rupp *(ed.)* He Pasa Ekklesia [The whole church]. An Original History of the Religious Denominations at Present Existing in the United States. Containing Authentic Accounts of Their Rise, Progress, Statistics and Doctrines. Written Expressly for the Work by Eminent Theological Professors, Ministers, and Lay-Members, of the Respective Denominations. Projected, Compiled and Arranged by I. Daniel Rupp, of Lancaster, Pa. Author of "Der Maertyrer Geschichte," Etc. Etc., *Philadelphia: James Y. Humphreys; Harrisburg, PA: Clyde and Williams; printed by C. Sherman; 1844*. p. 405.

[27] "Joseph Smith—History 1," n.d., https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/pgp/js-h/1?lang=eng, (accessed 11/13/2024). JS-H 1:30-43 (Pearl of Great Price. & JS-H 1:30-43).

[28] From the "Wentworth Letter," *History of the Church*, 4:536 March 1, 1842.

[28]There is no record of the exact number of visits from Moroni, but 22 have been documented (see H. D. Peterson, "Moroni—Joseph Smith's Tutor," *Ensign,* Jan. 1992, 22–29, footnote 11).

Saints" by B. H. Roberts. In this book, Roberts writes that Smith "had a vision of the tree of life and was taught the principles of salvation." However, Roberts does not provide any further details about this vision.

Another source that mentions The Vision of the Tree of Life is the book "The Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet" by Orson Pratt. In this book, Pratt writes that Smith "had a vision of the tree of life and was taught the principles of eternal life." However, Pratt also does not provide any further details about this vision. It is possible that The Vision of the Tree of Life is the same vision that is referred to in Smith's 1838 history as the "Vision of the Celestial Kingdom." In this vision, Smith saw the celestial kingdom of God and was taught about the rewards of the righteous. However, it is also possible that The Vision of the Tree of Life is a separate vision that Smith had. Ultimately, there is no way to know for sure what The Vision of the Tree of Life was or what it entailed. It is a vision that is mentioned in a few sources, but there is no detailed account of it.[29]

9) 1832 (tar & Feather) out of body experience

Joseph Smith Jr. Tar and Feather 1832 in Hiram Ohio His wife Emma Hale Smith remembered this incident “his spirit seemed to leave his body, and that during the period of insensibility he consciously stood over his own body, feeling no pain, but seeing and hearing all that transpired.” [30]

[29] Orson Pratt, The Life of Joseph Smith the Prophet (Liverpool: Orson Pratt, 1857). Roberts, B. H. History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Salt Lake City: Deseret News, 1902.

[30] Emma Hale Smith Bidamon, in *Recollections of the Pioneers of Lee County* (Dixon, IL: Inez A. Kennedy, 1893), 98.

10) Other visions: Sources differ in how many visions he had…ranging from a few dozen to over a hundred. It is important to note that there is no independent verification of Joseph Smith Jr.'s visions. They are based on his own accounts, which were written or recorded many years after the events they describe. As such, it is possible that some of the details of these accounts may have been misremembered or embellished.

Despite the lack of independent verification, Joseph Smith Jr.'s visions are an important part of the Latter-day Saint tradition. They are seen as evidence of his divine calling as a prophet and the founder of the Latter-day Saint Church.

11) Alvin Smith and Joseph Smith Sr. In November 1923 Alvin Smith died and a local minister from the Presbyterian Church said at his funeral that since he was not baptized, he could not be saved. In January 1836 Smith received a vision of the celestial kingdom, and saw that Alvin and his parents would someday inherit the kingdom.[31] Smith heard the Lord say, "All who have died without a knowledge of this gospel, who would have received it if they had been permitted to tarry, shall be heirs of the celestial kingdom of God; also all that shall die henceforth without a knowledge of it, who would have received it with all their hearts, shall be heirs of that kingdom; for I, the Lord, will judge all men according to their works, according to the desire of their hearts" [32]From 1840 in Nauvoo Smith preached the doctrine of the salvation of the dead. In 1840 Smith's father, Joseph Smith Sr., lay dying and Smith discussed the doctrine of the baptism of the dead with him. Just minutes before he died, he declared that he saw Alvin.[5] In the latter

[31] "Chapter 35: Redemption for the Dead," January 1, 2011, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-joseph-smith/chapter-35?lang=eng.

[32] D&C 137:7–9.

part of 1840, the Smith family rejoiced as Hyrum received the ordinance of baptism for his brother Alvin."[33] So Smith Sr. had a deathbed vision, and his son guides him to the afterlife.

So, we can see that many of Smiths visions formed the foundation of the LDS church, and these doctrines represent a more compassionate and loving approach to the previous Christian dilemma of the dire fate of the unbaptized.

12) Joseph Smith's Vision of the Celestial Kingdom he saw "that all children who die before they arrive at the years of accountability are saved in the celestial kingdom of heaven." This vision included his brother Alvin, and some prophets.[34] He saw the beauty of the gate, the blazing throne where Heavenly Father and Jesus sat, and he learned that all who die before hearing the gospel, the unbaptized, young children, can be saved because God judges their hearts.[35]

13) OLIVER COWDERY – On May 15, 1829, John the Baptist to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and gave them the authority to baptize.

Later, at an undocumented time but likely in 1829, in another heavenly manifestation, the Apostles Peter, James, and John appear to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and give them by the authority of the Holy Ghost to lay on hands.[36]

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[33] "Chapter 35: Redemption for the Dead," January 1, 2011, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/manual/teachings-joseph-smith/chapter-35?lang=eng.

[34] D&C 137:10, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/137?lang=eng&id=10#p10.

[35] D&C 137, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/scriptures/dc-testament/dc/137?lang=eng.

[36] "Dating the Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood," Ensign, June 1979, 4–10; Richard Lyman Bushman, Joseph Smith: Rough Stone Rolling (New York: Knopf, 2005), 116–18, and 588, note 35.

In 1836 in the Kirtland Temple, Elijah appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery and gave them keys, or authority, that would enable them "to turn the hearts of the Fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole Earth be smitten with a curse."'[37]

14) Restoring the Fullness

In 1836 Elijah appeared to Joseph Smith and Oliver Cowdery in the Kirtland Temple. He Cowdery and gave them keys, or authority, that would enable them "to turn the hearts of the Fathers to the children, and the children to the fathers, lest the whole Earth be smitten with a curse."[38] In Nauvoo Joseph Smith explained that the "power and calling of Elijah is that ye have power to hold the keys of the revelations, ordinances, oracles, powers, and endowments of the fulness of the Melchizedek Priesthood." [39]

"This authority enabled Church leaders to place "the seals of the Melchizedek priesthood upon the house of Israel" in preparation for the coming of the Messiah to His Temple." [40]

"Acting under this restored authority, Joseph Smith introduced the Temple endowment and sealing ordinances in Nauvoo, Illinois, in the 1840s in preparation for the completion of the Temple there."[41]

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[37] Church History Topics. Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood. (The terms Aaronic and Melchizedek priesthood were not used or developed until later).
"Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood," January 1,
2018, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/restoration-of-the-melchizedek-priesthood?lang=eng.

[38] "Visions, 3 April 1836 [D&C 110]" in Joseph Smith, Journal, September 1835–April 1836,
193, josephsmithpapers.org. Church History Topics. Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood.
"Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood," January 1,
2018, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/restoration-of-the-melchizedek-priesthood?lang=eng. Visions, 3 April 1836 [D&C 110], p. 193, The Joseph Smith Papers, accessed November 13, 2024, https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/visions-3-april-1836-dc-110/2#josephsmithpapers.

[39] Church History Topics. Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood.

[40] Joseph Smith sermon, Wilford Woodruff journal, Mar. 10, 1844, in Ehat and Cook, The Words of Joseph Smith, 328–29, 331–32; spelling and punctuation standardized.

[41] Restoration of the Melchizedek Priesthood, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, website: https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/history/topics/restoration-of-the-melchizedek-priesthood?lang=eng.

15) LORENZO DOW YOUNG, 1826 younger brother of Brigham Young had a prophetic vision aged 9. “He recorded standing in an open space, seeing a carriage coming along a road that led up into the air. The carriage was white and brilliant with gold and the horses traveled like the wind. It was made manifest to me that the Savior was in the carriage, and that it was driven by his servant. The carriage stopped near me, and the Savior inquired where my brother Brigham was. After informing him, he further inquired about my other brothers and our father. After I had answered His inquiries, he stated that he wanted us all, but he especially wanted my brother Brigham."[42]

BRIGHAM YOUNG’S Visions And Dreams (Illnesses in 1842 and 1847)

a) November 26th, 1842:

> I was suddenly attacked with a slight fit of apoplexy [a loss of consciousness]. Next morning I felt quite comfortable; but in the evening, at the same hour that I had the fit the day before, I was attacked with the most violent fever I ever experienced. The Prophet Joseph and Elder Willard Richards visited and administered unto me; the Prophet prophesied that I should live and recover from my sickness. He sat by me for six hours and directed my attendant what to do for me. In about thirty hours from the time of my being attacked by the fever, the skin began to peel from my body, and I was skinned all over. I desired to be baptized in the river, but it was not until the 14th day that brother Joseph would give his consent for me to be showered with cold water, when my fever began to break, and it left me on the18th day. I laid upon my back and was not turned upon my side for eighteen days. When the fever left me on the 18th day, I was bolstered up in my chair, but was so near gone that I could not close my eyes, which were set in my head—my chin dropped down and my breath stopped. My wife [Mary Ann], seeing my situation, threw some cold water in my face, that having no effect, she dashed a hand full of strong camphor in my face and eyes, which I did not feel in the least, neither did I move a muscle. She then held my nostrils between her thumb and finger, and placing her mouth directly over mine, blew into my lungs until she filled them with air. This set my lungs in motion, and I again began to breathe" [43]

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[42] “The Prophetic Dream About Jesus Christ Brigham Young’s Brother Had Before Finding the Church - LDS Living,” LDS Living, June 13, 2017, https://www.ldsliving.com/the-prophetic-dream-about-jesus-christ-brigham-youngs-brother-had-before-finding-the-church/s/85615.

James Amasa Little, Biography of Lorenzo Dow Young in Utah Historical Quarterly Vol. 14 no, 104, (1946): 26,Biography of Lorenzo Dow Young - Issuu.

[43] Cannon, Donald Q. “Brigham Young on Life and Death.” *Mormon Historical Studies* Vol. 2 No. 2 Fall (2001).

b) On 17 February 1847, a seriously ill Brigham Young told his associate and fellow apostle Willard Richards, "I actually went into Eternity last Wednesday and came back again." [44]

Brigham Young camp Journal of Willard Richards entry Feb 28, 1847

> A week last Wednesday I was taken sick suddenly and could not get back to the bed…I felt like death grappled with me. I woke. I had been where Joseph and Hyrum were, [the next life]. It is hard coming [back] to life again. I went into another world and recollected what I saw...'[45]
> Next day I was on the bed and fell asleep "I saw Joseph he sat at a brilliant window…I kissed him many times and asked why we were not together. He said it is all right, we cannot live together yet. He showed they were organized perfectly. Every person's heart will be perfectly prepared to receive the station organized for him [in the next life]. He was at the edge of the light…They'll get just what they want – God wants us to be good, righteous and go to heaven. God does not want anyone to do a mean inch." [46]

c) Dream vision of JS – *A vision given to President Brigham* Joseph stepped toward me, and *Young at Council Bluffs, Iowa, 17 February* 1847. He says it was a dream he had when very sick, but it qualifies as a VTE. [A vision given to President Brigham Young at Council Bluffs Iowa Feb 17th, 1847, a few days before the VTE on the 28th of Feb. above but it is similar wording]

> "While sick and asleep on the 17th I dreamed I went to see Joseph. He saw him sitting on a chair, he greeted and kissed him and they conversed. He noticed a handrail between

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[44] Willard Richards journal, 28 February 1847, Church History Library, Salt Lake City.

[45] "Journal (volume 17), 1846 December-1847 April in Willard Richards journals and papers, 1821-1854," Church History Catalog. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints., accessed November 13, 2024, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/bc9f64b9-af10-4233-b43d-8787fadaa0e6/0/281.

Willard Richards journals and papers, 1821-1854; Journals; Journal (volume 17), 1846 December-1847 April; Church History Library, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/bc9f64b9-af10-4233-b43d-8787fadaa0e6/0/281. (accessed: March 19, 2023): 282-5.

[46] Journal (volume 17), 1846 December-1847 April in Willard Richards journals and papers, 1821-1854," Church History Catalog. The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints., accessed November 13, 2024, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/bc9f64b9-af10-4233-b43d-8787fadaa0e6/0/281.

Willard Richards journals and papers, 1821-1854; Journals; Journal (volume 17), 1846 December-1847 April; Church History Library, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/bc9f64b9-af10-4233-b43d-8787fadaa0e6/0/281 (accessed: March 19, 2023): 282-5.

them, and a window full of light behind Joseph, who gave him counsel on how to guide the people. 'Tell the brethren if they follow the Spirit of the Lord they will be alright."[47]

c) The many teachings Brigham Young gave on the Spirit World revealed almost a personal familiarity with it.

DATA OF ORDINARY MORMONS SET OUT BY CATEGORY/ 80 ELEMENTS

A THE JOURNEY

(1) THE VEIL

i) Lovisa Mack Tuttle 1784 an aunt of Joseph Smith Jr. had a VTE on her deathbed. 1784 She spoke in church after she had been miraculously healed from her illness. : "I seemed to be borne away to the world of spirits where I saw the savior, as through a *Veil*, which appeared to me about as thick as a spider's web and he told me that I must return again to warn the people to prepare for death; that I must exhort them to be watchful as well as prayerful." [48]

ii) Loisie M. Goates 1890 "A vail [sic] was lifted and I was told to look and oh there was a room or hall with all the Goates loved ones all [illegible writing] and seemed like a meeting was going on. They were praying for me below and I might return to my family for a space of time. The two boy[s] that raised the vail was told me was my husband's brother John that had

[47] Danielle B. Wagner, "Brigham Young's Near-Death Experience and What It Taught Him About the Spirit World - LDS Living," LDS Living, September 21, 2021, https://www.ldsliving.com/brigham-youngs-near-death-experience-and-what-it-taught-him-about-the-spirit-world/s/81924. Brigham Young, "Sunstone A Novel Leaf," 1994, https://sunstone.org/wp-content/uploads/sbi/articles/097-86.pdf. *An Olive Leaf "Tell the People to Keep the Spirit." Sunstone.* 86 (Dec 1994): By Brigham Young.

[48] RSC, "The Near-Death Experience | Religious Studies Center," n.d., https://rsc.byu.edu/life-beyond-grave/near-death-experience, (accessed 11/12/2024). Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, Lucy Mack Smith* (Salt Lake City: Improvement Era Salt Lake City Utah. 1902), 20,https://archive.org/details/HistoryOfTheProphetJosephSmithByHisMotherLucyMackSmith.

dide [died] and the other one I did not recognize; they were so busy and happy I wanted to stay but could not and had to return.[49]

iii) Mary Hales 1925 "While I was in the hospital after the accident, I told my parents about my experience with Howard, and how he had been preaching the gospel to all those soldiers. After that they felt much better about losing him, knowing he had a mission on the other side of the Veil."[50]

> **iv) Mr. Woods VTE 1940** "Sister Wood was deaf. During a conference session she told one speaker, Elder Melvin J. Ballard, that she had heard and understood his speech. Soon after he became ill and was in hospital. During the night Mr. Wood's spirit left his body while he slept. As he left his body, he felt sad if his wife, Mrs. Woods, found his lifeless body in the morning. He traveled to the Celestial Room and when he got there, he saw many people there dressed in white. He asked them why they were waiting there, and they said that they were waiting for a special spirit to come through the Veil. The special spirit arrived, and it was Elder Ballard. When President Woods saw him, he returned to his body. He then awoke his wife and told her that Elder Ballard had died. In the morning they received the message that Elder Ballard had died at 2am, just before President Woods had awoken his wife to tell her he had died."[51]

v) Gerald Maas 1961 recounted how a bishop told him about **a 2nd councilor** who had died several years before. He went in and out of a coma, and the man said he'd visited "the other side." He also predicted the two bishops visiting would die in 1966 and 1983 and he's meet them then.[52]

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[49] Loisie M. Goates, Faith-promoting Collection 1882-1974, box 2, folder 13.
(Courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

[50] Lee Nelson, *Beyond the Veil,* vol. 3, (Cedar Fort, Inc., 1990).

[51] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. 'Seeing the dead' Mrs. Helen G. Jones Lehi Utah Jab 1968 by Kathleen Hutchings. She heard about this incident in the Celestial Room of the Canadian Temple, and it was told to her by President Woods, president of that Temple in 1940.

[52] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 8. Told by Gerald Maas 1961.

vi) Russell Ricks 1966 NDE is a 'breaching the Veil of heaven',[53] I was taken to the other side of this mortal Veil, into the world of spirits.[54] He had an STE focusing on meeting Jesus in his pre-birth life and receiving guidance before he was born. He concludes. 'It is my personal witness that the Veil between Earth and heaven is often very thin. Those on the other side of the Veil are aware of us and are concerned for our welfare. Sometimes, individuals who have passed on are given special permission to visit mortals (often their posterity) on Earth, to relay messages of concern, to assist the answer to a heartfelt prayer, or to warn or bring comfort.'

vii) Lawrence Tooley – 1972 - accident at work, fell of a high scaffold. On Earth memories of the Spirit World are erased and the world separated by the Veil "if you go back the Veil will probably drop across your mind again. If that happens then you won't remember anything. [55] AND Veil – the Veil is caused by the discord between Father and man men separate from their Father and his teachings which causes the Veil. Tooley describes greatly increased awareness as former knowledge returns, I was again in possession of superior knowledge and intelligence that had been withheld from me since I had first gone to Earth. Larry his guide explains that returning through the Veil means the Veil has been removed and former knowledge will return.[56]

viii) Betty Eadie - 1973 'birth is a sleep and a forgetting.' "Things were coming back to me from long before my life on Earth, things that had been purposely blocked from me by a Veil of forgetfulness at my birth."[57]

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[53] Ricks, *Remember: A Little Boy's,* xvii, 17, 116.
[54] Ricks, *Remember: A Little Boy's,* 17.
[55] Tooley, Lawrence E. *I Saw Heaven.* 1312, 1333. (Kindle).
[56] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1006. (Kindle).
[57] Eadie, Betty J. *Embraced by the Light*. (Gold Leaf Press, 1992), 44, 97.

ix) Just before **David Brooks** saw his departed wife, the room filled with light. "Immediately I saw a dim light filling the room, it was not a brilliant light but a soft light, then it began to part in the center like a curtain. As it parted, I saw in the opening the most beautiful sight in all the world, my lovely wife." Loisie M. Goates, *Faith-promoting Collection 1882-1974,* box 2, folder 13 (Courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).[58]

x) Sarah Menet 1979- She talks of a film or barrier between Earth life and this other non-mortal world. “The film is like a thin transparent wall of some fine matter that, by passing through it, prevents ne from going back to Earth life.” 35 [me – this is not exactly the same as the Veil but more like a barrier of no return which come just before the return]

xi) Chad Daybell 1985/1993 “ancestors watch us from the other side of the Veil… xii we work together from both sides of the Veil.”[59]

xii) Kim Rives The Veil prevents communication between the worlds. An example is when spirits can see try to talk to the living but are not heard or seen. She saw her mother crying on the phone when thinking her daughter was dying “I was touched with compassion and at the same time I felt confused. I knew I wasn't dead because here I was. In fact, I had never felt more alive. I yelled out through thought, "Mom! I'm alive, I'm okay!" But she could not hear me and continued to cry.”[60]

xiii) Suzanne Freeman 1999 “children, who don't have as much of a Veil as adults do.”[61]

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[58] Crowther, *Life Everlasting,* 59-60.
[59] Daybell, *Living on the Edge,* xi, xii.
[60] Rives. *Walk Thru Heaven.* 140.
[61] Freeman, *Led by the Hand of Christ*, 128.

xiv) Lance Richardson 1999 (1961-2004) - 'As I stepped forward I pushed outward in the darkness and brushed against something. It felt like a thin Veil or curtain. As I parted the substance an intense light filled with warmth and love fell upon me and beckoned me forward. It was a brilliant light that immediately dispersed all the darkness about me.' [62] "I watched several people pass through the Veil while I was there." He saw families meet the people arriving though the Veil and the celebrations. "I scanned the grayish curtain-like matter they called the Veil. It went on for as far as I could see." "The messenger, Randy, and I were transported to the Veil, at an astonishing speed. It felt as if we were sucked though space to the location of my entrance through the Veil. "I embraced Randy then stepped through the Veil. I was immediately drawn into my body." He returns to the Spirit World "I remember feeling a sudden swooshing feeling as I was taken…out of my body."

xv) Julie Rowe 2004 "I had the very real experience of visiting beyond the Veil in the Spirit World. That world is right here on Earth-just in another realm of sorts." "I was given the blessing and privilege of visiting beyond the Veil." She was between the worlds seeing both hospital staff and dead relatives; "The Veil was still very thin for me."[63]

xvi) Ralph Jensen had lost his first wife before his VTE: "I know that Carol has been helping the children from her side of the Veil) the separation between mortality and the post-mortal Spirit World)."[64] "I passed through the Veil for the second time into the Spirit World and entered into what appeared to be a greeting area of sorts."[65]

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[62] Richardson, *The Message*, 51, 67, 77, 85.
[63] Rowe, *Greater Tomorrow: My Journey,* 1,5,6.
[64] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 12.
[65] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 16.

vii) Mark Pedersen is a doctor who suffered from Chrones disease and had to have multiple bowel surgeries: "I had come close enough to the Veil of death that I had begun to see the spirits on the other side."[66]

(2) OUT OF BODY/AUTOSCOPY

i) Lorenzo Dow Young 1826 It was in his most vivid VTE however on June 6th, 1826, that he had a vision. "In a moment I was out of my body and fully conscious of the change. I was sensible that I had passed through what we call death. I felt and acted as naturally as I had done in the body, with all my sensations as complete without as with it." [67]

ii) Heroine Randall 1830 "She related to others as well as to me, that at that time her spirit

departed from her body, and rose above it, and that she looked down and saw her husband and friends weeping over it."[68]

iii) Joseph Eldridge, great grandfather of Inez Robinson Preece (Smith) 1833 had a VTE as a sick child – "I thought I died. I looked down on my body and could see myself lying there. My father and mother were leaning over each other weeping for me."[69]

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[66] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife*, 54.

[67] Lorenzo Dow Young. "Biography of Lorenzo Dow Young," Issuu, n.d., https://issuu.com/utah10/docs/volume_14_1946/s/69523.

[68] Alvin Knisley, comp., *Infallible Proofs, A Collection of Spiritual Communications and Remarkable Experiences* (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

[69] Submitted by Inez Robinson Smith. Written in 1947. *Life Sketch.* Call # MS 10812 (1000050000202) Manuscript on Microfilm) MS 10812 Joseph Eldridge, born in 1825, great grandfather of Inez Robinson Preece (Smith) who inherited his life story in his journal dated 1937. Church History Library.

iv) Phoebe Carter Woodruff 1838 She 'died' in 1838…ill all October. She revived Spirit reentered body Dec 2nd She recalled leaving her body, looking down on it… and she saw it lying upon the bed, and the sisters weeping. [70]

v) 1840 – A Woman saved her two children from drowning as she washed clothes in a river. "She dived in and brought the two children to the surface and saved them. As she came out of the water, she saw herself, her body from above, half drowned with water coming out of her mouth."[71]

vi) Jacob Hamblin 1858 fell from a tree and was almost dead. "During the time my body lay in this condition it seemed to me that I went up from the Earth and looked down upon it and it appeared like a dark ball."[72]

vii) David P. Kimball 1881 "About 11 p.m., I awoke and to my surprise saw some six or eight men standing around my bed. I had no dread of them but felt that they were my friends."[73]

viii) Brigham Smoot 1889 "When you took my body out of the water, I was with you. When you walked up and down the beach I walked up and down with you. I saw my body. I prayed to God with all my soul that you would not bury me nor consider me dead until you exercised the power of your priesthood. I was told by something that it was the priesthood that had the power to return my spirit to my body. I watched you all the time."[74]

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[70] Wilford Woodruff in 'Leaves from my Journal", 53-55, https://archive.org/details/leavesfrommyjour00woodrich/page/54/mode/2up

[71] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. p.9. Return from the Dead, Dec 1967 Provo UT. Collector Garn Schumann. Informant Mrs. Olea P. Schumann. She heard the story from her mother 30 years before. It happened about 1840.

[72] Hamblin, Jacob, 1819-1886; Little, James A. (James Amasa), 1822-1908; Dellenbaugh, Frederick Samuel, 1853-1935 UPB. 1881 publisher is Juvenile Instructor Office, SLC, UT, https://archive.org/details/jacobhamblinnarr1881hamb.

[73] Orson F. Whitney, *Helpful Visions, The 14th Book of the Faith-Promoting Series* (Salt Lake City: Juvenile Instructor Office, 1887), 10-11, 13-17, 22.

[74] Edward J. Wood, Conference Report, April 1917, 130-131.

ix) Loisie M. Goates 1890 died after childbirth and one of her twins also died. "While on the bed of sickness my spirit left my body and by all that loving hands could do I was called gone. The Doctor was called, and he said I can do nothing the woman is gone, the heart has quit beating…all that could be called with Grandpa Goates, circled my bed and prayed for me to live. … [During this] time this was going on I could see my body…in bed (I being above it) …my sister calling or speaking to me asking me who I wanted to take my baby,"[75]

x) Levi Curtis recollected that **William D. Huntington 1892** when he was in Nauvoo (circa 1839) had had an OBE with perfect consciousness. He was ill, his spirit left his body and drifted to the ceiling. He watched from above as people below him mourned his death. [76]

> **xi) Victoria Clayton McCune, 1867-1931, n.d.:**
> "It seemed then that the thing which gave me power to think, see, hear and understand was still alive, but not of the body, but seemed to be at the side of and just above the bed. It senses no fear as before, neither was it sensible to cold or any inconvenience, but was agreeable and comfortable, and could see the body upon the bed to all appearances dead. A sense of ownership seemed there. I knew that body belonged to me. It was very pale, the eyes were dosed and the features set in death-even the hands so used to toil seemed claimed by death. "I saw the doctor standing at the foot of the bed as if stunned. My husband came in just then and asked, 'How is she?' and the doctor said, 'dead.' "My husband said, 'What?' '‘. And the doctor said, "Mr.-your wife is dead.'… In the mean time the part of me by the bed watched the doctor, who seemed to be getting control of himself and preparing something to inject into the body. Then I looked at the body. A feeling of peace was upon me, it seemed that a greater happiness was mine free from that body. An intense desire came over me to forever be free."[77]

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[75] Loisie M. Goates, Faith-promoting Collection 1882-1974, box 2, folder 13.
(Courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

[76] Juvenile Instructor v. 27 # 12 June 15 1892 385-386 Juvenile Instructor : George Quayle Cannon 1827 – 1901; Deseret Sunday School Union (1872-1971).
Juvenile instructor; 1891-1900 (Volumes 26-35); 1892 (Volume 27); 1892 June 15 (No. 12); Church History Library, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/04801c6e-04c1-4220-98d9-ece9db62aebd/0/0. (accessed: August 26, 2023) 385-386. Juvenile Instructor: George Quayle Cannon 1827 – 1901; Deseret Sunday School Union (1872-1971).

[77] Victoria Clayton McCune, folder 8, Collection 1891-1967, Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1-8.

xii) Albert M. Boyce born 1854 was washing in hot springs, fainted, drown, heart stopped beating, revived by a passing Indian. "At the same moment, as Grandfather testified later, he found himself standing next to his own body, watching these proceedings. He said that he knew his soul had been 'lifted' out of his body to watch the Indian attempt to get his heart to beat again…But suddenly Grandfather felt himself re-entering his body, and the next thing he knew he was bringing up water from his stomach."[78]

xiii) Ella Jensen 1891. "My spirit left my body."[79] While most out of the body experiences occur at the beginning, Ella's occurred when she returned to her body "As I returned, I could see my body lying on the bed and the folks gathered about in the room. I hesitated for a moment, then thought, yes, I will go back for a little while."[80]

xiv) Dr. Wiltse before 1892 "I directed my gaze … and saw my own dead body."[81] During Dr. Wiltse autoscopy His spirit arm went through an Earth persons arm.

xv) Mr. Bertrand Looking down I was astounded to recognize my own envelope [body]. 'Strange!' said I to myself 'There is the corpse in which I lived and which I called *me,* as if the coat were the body, as if the body were the soul![82]

xvi) Thos. S. Thomas had a VTE in **1894** when he was extremely sick and assumed dead in his sickbed by the attending physician. He has an amazing description of what he calls the

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[78] Jennie Verna Boshart, story about Albert M. Boyce, 1973 (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

[79] Talking Scripture. *Ella Jensen raised from the Dead by Lorenzo Snow*. This article is Condensed from Sept.-Oct.1929, issues of *The Improvement Era*, 32:883, https://archive.org/details/improvementera32012unse/page/972/mode/2up.

Snow, L. C. "Raised from the Dead." *Improvement Era* 32, no. 12 (1929).972-980. https://www.ldsscriptureteachings.org/2016/12/ella-jensen-raised-from-the-dead-by-lorenzo-snow/

80 Ella Jensen 'Ella Jensen raised from the dead by Lorenzo Snow," https://www.ldsscriptureteachings.org/2016/12/ella-jensen-raised-from-the-dead-by-lorenzo-snow/

[81] "How One Feels When Dying," *Juvenile Instructor* 27, (September 15, 1892), 570-72.

[82] "How One Feels When Dying," *The Juvenile Instructor* 27 (September 15, 1892), 572-73.

'great beyond' He could see the nurse call at his mother's house and then his brother's house while he was dying in bed. He said, "my soul, free from the body, was a thousand times brighter…liberty was mine to go where I chose about this Earth." He saw his brother rush in the room only to be told Thomas was dead. He saw family enter the room. He saw his brother write the telegrams and he could read them. Then he witnessed them on the journey being delivered. "I saw the messages travel in waves along the wires." "I was able to follow the messages along the wires because my position was such that my mode of travel was much faster than the movement of telegraphy." He reports seeing the message arrive and the emotional reactions of his relatives when they received them. "I was able to keep track of many other things that transpired, or was my will to keep track of, anywhere on this globe." He 'flew' over the entire world on a 'trip of Earthly investigation'[83]

xvii) George Washington Brimhall - before 1895 commented that when he died, "My spirit arose out of my body and was ascending from it very slowly, feeling perfectly happy and without pain." [84]

xviii) Peter E. Johnson 1898 summer had a fever and illness. Soon after that my spirit left my body. Just how, I cannot tell; but I perceived myself standing some four or five feet in the air and saw my body lying on the bed. I felt perfectly natural, but as this was a new condition, I began to make observations. I turned my head, shrugged my shoulders, felt with my hands, and realized that it was I, myself. I also knew that my body was lying, lifeless, on the bed. While I

[83] Thomas, Thos. S., A Glimpse of the Future. Thos. S. Thomas, Malad Idaho 1924 First edition.
[84] Orson F. Whitney, *History of Utah,* vol. 4 (Salt Lake City: George Q. Cannon & Sons, 1904), 170.

was in a new environment, it did not seem strange, for I realized everything that was going on and perceived that I was the same in the spirit as I had been in the body.[85]

xix) Harriet Ovard Lee 1901 when she died. She said, "I saw my husband and all the people in the room, some of them crying and wringing their hands over my lifeless body, at the sight of which I shuddered." [86]

xx) Bertha Deusnup Elder 1913" Bertha's condition worsened, and then she passed away. Bertha first became aware that she had died when she found herself rising above her bed. Then she noticed that all of the pain she had been suffering was gone." She realized that "the pain and discomfort of a few moments earlier was suddenly gone." [87]

xxi) Henry Moroni Zollinger 1920, who 'died' from an electric shock when the end of his derrick pole hit a live electric wire in 1920, "My spirit left my body and I could see it lying under the derrick frame.[88] "My spirit left the body and I could see it lying under the derrick, an at that moment my guardian angel, my mother, and my sister Ann were beside me. My mother died January 31, 1918, and my sister at the age of four years. [89]

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[85] Visit into the spirit world, Peter E. Johnson (From Relief Society. Magazine, Aug.1920) Mission Unfinished By Peter E. Johnson. (From Relief Society. Magazine, Aug. 1920)

[86] Harriet Ovard Lee, "A remarkable vision 1901" (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

[87] Sullivan, Marlene Bateman. *Gaze into Heaven: Near-Death Experiences in Early Church History*. Springville, Utah: CFI, 2013. p. 148 and Lee Nelson, *Beyond 1he Veil,* vol. 1, (Cedar Fort, Inc.,1988), 37-40.

[88] Henry Moroni Zollinger (1881-1967) Aug 7, 1920. in Family Search family record uploaded to https://ancestors.familysearch.org/en/KWZ9-7P2/henry-moroni-zollinger-1881-1967.

This story is also recorded in BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10. Legend. 'Uncle Harry returns from the dead by Sharon Zollinger, Reynolds Longwood Florida. 1984. Sharon was born in Logan UT in 1942 and been LDS all her life. Her family came from Switzerland. Her informer writing is her daughter. She says her mother was told this story by her father, but he had been reluctant to discuss it because he felt it was 'a sensitive and spiritual matter." Written by Rose Marie Reynolds Provo UT 1984.Father knew the story was common knowledge throughout the Cache valley. He heard the story whilst a teenager. Story about Henry Moroni Zollinger born 1881 in Providence UT, one of 13 children. Henry was her great uncle. A farmer and devout Mormon He recovered from the accident and lived until he was 86. He said he had returned to complete his Earthly mission. It is also in Duane Crowther's book *Life Everlasting: A Definitive Study of Life After Death*. 1968.

[89] Crowther, *Life Everlasting,* 5. and Lundahl, *Collection of Near-Death Research Readings*,172.

xxii) Frederick Babble 1920 operation the man's spirit left his mortal body. Frederick Babbel relates the story and explains that when the doctor made the incision in the operating room and exposed the tumor, it was perilously dose to the jugular vein, just as he had feared. At this moment, the man's spirit rose above his body, and he heard the doctor tell the nurse, "I can't go on. If I do, he will die."[90]

xxiii) Lucy Pearl Leavitt Randall 1921 was ill with pneumonia. "Her spirit left her body – she was permitted to enter the Spirit World for a short period of time. She met people she knew to be previously deceased. Her father and GF. She conversed with them and asked if she could return to life. They told her she could if she chose, for a short period of time. Her spirit returned to the body. Then she died 2 or 3 days later."[91]

xxiv) Herman Stulz 1921 had two NDEs in both he experienced autoscopy and saw his body from the outside. He fell into a waterfall aged 10 and was underwater for 30 minutes before he was rescued. Herman states, "Slowly my struggle ended, the choking ended and I felt calm and serene. It was like I was in a dream and I saw myself standing on the opposite shores, watching little Herman spinning around under the fall, … I felt no more pains… I saw both of them (his siblings) running to my rescue. I saw him (Hans) try on my own water soaked body as he rolled me over a log that had come floating down the steam as I was watching him, squeezing the water out of me, until of a sudden my spirit walking towards Hans took possession of my body again. [92]

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[90] Frederick and June Babble, *To Him That Believeth: Claiming Heaven's Blessings* (Cedar Fort, Inc., 1997), 25-27. Used with permission.

[91] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Recounted by Bishop James A Randall, 1961, who was Lucy Pearl Leavitt Randall's son.

[92] Herman Stulz, *Autobiography* [ca.1971] (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

xxv) Walter P. Monson 1923 "Suddenly, I was stricken with a coldness that attacked my feet and hands. It moved up my limbs and up my arms towards my body. I felt it reach my heart. There was a slight murmur. I gasped for breath and lapsed into unconsciousness, so far as all things mortal were concerned. Then I awoke in full possession of all my faculties in another sphere of life. "I stood apart from my body and looked at it. I saw it lying upon the bed. I noticed that its eyes were partly closed and that the chin had dropped. I was now without pain, and the joy of freedom I felt and the peace of mind that came over me were the sweetest sensations I have ever experienced in all my life. I lost all sense of time and space. And the law of gravitation had no hold upon me." … "I was now without pain, and the joy of freedom I felt and the peace of mind that came over me were the sweetest sensations I had ever experienced in all my life."[93]

xxvi) 1924 Edna Coray Dyer "became ill and took to bed, feeling like she was dying. "The next she knew her spirit was poised on a very high pinnacle like a bird ready for flight. In all directions extended an entrancing panorama and facing her appeared a large picture, framed in draperies, like a stage…she identified the scene as her own stage of action in the Spirit World."[94]

xxvii) Robert Aimes, circa 1945, was an American soldier injured fighting in North Africa. "Aimes reports that his spirit left his body. He viewed the scene, including his own body, from slightly above for some time, wondering about the advisability of reuniting with it and striving to live again."[95]

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[93] Jeremiah Stokes, *Modern Miracles.* (Bookcraft, 1945), 78-81.

[94] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. A Visit Beyond Dec. 1966. 2. Informant Mrs. Jennie Noel Weeks.

[95] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 8 1951-1959. Robert Aimes high school teacher – related events recorded here by Steven C. Walker in a testimony meeting of 2nd Ward Heber UT in Jan 1951. The incident occurred in 1945 in North Africa.

xxviii) Brother Carl DeHaven 1956-57 “had surgery in Oregon under anesthesia but during the operation he woke up and realized he was standing high up in the corner of the room and looking down. “He realized he as observing himself down below on the operating table with the doctors and nurses around him. It was apparent that it was an emergency situation with the doctors and nurses working tensely over him. Then he saw the surgeon make an incision in his chest over his heart, reach into the incision and manipulate or massage his heart.”[96]

xxix) Marriner Wood Merrill Before 1956 ""Father relates that his spirit left his body and stood, as it were, in the air above it. He could see his body and the men standing around and he heard their conversation.”[97]

xxx) Stanley C. Parker reported a VTE Circa 1966 “a man I worked with was buried in a trench for 20 minutes. Later he told me that he could see his body and that he was not in his body.”[98]

xxxi) 1967 “A **bus of people** was going on a Temple excursion from Mesa AZ was in an accident and one man was hurt badly and died. He recovered. He said his spirit had left his body and he looked down on his battered body with glass in his eyes He didn’t want to go back to it because he dreaded the pain and thought he would be blind. Then he thought of his family. He saw someone come along and wipe the glass from his eyes. Next, he was back in his body and not blind. He lived a long time.”[99]

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[96] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10. 8-9. Testimony of Brother Carl DeHaven Oregon. Reported by Mrs. Wilbur E. June Wilson, Vernonia Oregon 1973. This happened around the winter of 1956-7.

[97] Bryant S. Hinckley, comp., *The Faith of Our Pioneer Fathers* (Salt Lake City: Bookcraft, 1956), 183.

[98] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10.p.10. To heaven and Back Collected by Louise M Parker SLC UT 1974. Reported by Stanley C. Parker. VTE circa 1966.

[99] Colle BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Collected Dec 1967 Upland CA by Rex Allread. Informant Mrs. Eunice Allred his mother. She heard story a few years prior from Mrs. Downey Stout of SLC UT. No Date of incident.

xxxii) Before 1968 – "**A man** Next, very sick and lay in a hospital bed when his spirit left his body. The spirit wandered around the hospital. A Doctor came to check on his body and pronounced him dead. A little while later the spirit returned to the body and shocked the doctor. He told the Dr he had got lost walking around and did not recognize his own body when trying to find it again."[100]

xxxiii) Before 1970 "Joan's aunt" had a friend who had a tonsillectomy. "While she was on the operating table she began to hemorrhage, and the spirit left the body. When it left, she sat in the corner of the room watching the efforts to save her. As she was watching her deceased mother came to her and told her that it wasn't her time to go, so she went back and lived." [101]

xxxiv) 1977 Sellesa Hurd Snarr was in a drowning incident on Rigby Lake in ID " I remember I was lying there on the beach and I kind of looked down on my body, Kind of like my spirit was going out of my body. I was like "is this really happening to me?"[102]

xxxv) Brian Glenn 1993 Brian "said he saw the baby (himself) and his mother coming out and opening the garage door, telling him not to leave. The mother remembers this and kneeling down by the crushed dead body. She had told him to stay and not to go. She realized Brian was describing an OBE, viewing his own lifeless body, and that the birdies were angels

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[100] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. p.10. 'Spirit Leaving Body and Returning.' Karen Gibson Jan 1968 Provo UT. written by Kathleen Hutchings. Karen Gibson is 20 years old. She did not know the date of the incident but heard it from a Sunday School teacher in California.

[101] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10. p.1 Joan Upton, San Jose CA. 40 told the aunt of Linda Bass Provo UT who wrote this in 1970.

[102] Sellesa Hurd Snarr. Idaho LDS age 46. Written in 2016 by the collector, Jody Hansen, who is a BYU student is in her ward. Online link to her VTE in BYU library: https://lib.byu.edu/search/byu/record/cdm.folklore.278?holding=3n6rslxlozi5aqe7. https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/folklore/id/278.

from beyond the Veil. He saw the ambulance man take him from the garage floor to the ambulance… The birdies love us he says."[103]

xxxvi) Larry Tooley – "I was confused as I began to lift off the floor and rose to an uptight position" …" I sensed I had died and was no longer inside my body. I was facing away from my body …and felt no desire to return to it and look back at it." "I began rising toward the ceiling… As if I were standing in a very thick fog." He experienced autoscopy, did not care about his body and felt no pain.[104]

xxxvii) Betty Eadie notes are taken from an interview with Oprah Winfrey (2011)[105] In her own words she describes the sensation of being sucked out of her body and then seeing herself lying on the hospital bed.[106] My death after operation hysterectomy - Sinking sensation " I heard a soft buzzing sound in my head and continued to sink until I felt my body become still and lifeless. Then I felt a surge of energy. It was almost as If I felt a pop or release inside me, and my spirit was suddenly drawn out through my chest and pulled upward… I was free…. I was above the bed, hovering near the ceiling…I saw a body lying on the bed….then I recognized it as my own…It was as if I had taken off a used garment and had put it aside." She found that her spirit body could move through solid things as she went through the closed window... "I began moving at tremendous speed as she 'flew' to her home. She saw her husband sitting in his chair

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[103] Glenn, Lloyd Gardner. 'Free The Birdies.' Manuscript on Microfilm Call # MS 15490 (100000656891) Written by Lloyd Gardner Glenn 1994 for a High Council talk delivered in Lake Forest Ward Santa Margarita CA Stake. In 1993 - His 3-year-old son Brian had been crushed beneath the garage door and rushed to Mission Hospital. Miraculously he survived with no physical or neurological deficits. Church History Library.

[104] Tooley, I saw Heaven,919. (Kindle)

105 TheAstroboy9 Channel, "Oprah Winfrey Interviews Betty Eadie - (Part 1 of 2)," December 7, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6uUiYFaawTU.

TheAstroboy9 Channel, "Oprah Winfrey Interviews Betty Eadie - (Part 2 of 2) - With Prelude by Kevin F. Montague," July 26, 2015, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lHDl0m9rZ0c.

[106] The Astroboy9 Channel, "Oprah Winfrey Interviews Betty Eadie."

and her children playing. After returning to her hospital bed, she saw her three friends then she hears a rushing sound. [107]

xxxviii) Elane Durham witness herself from above in the ambulance and later when she was in the morgue, assumed dead.' [108]

xxxix) Sarah L. Menet "By the time they reached the apartment building, I was out of my body and looking down on everything from somewhere near the ceiling." She saw police knock on the door and a neighbor let them in. She saw them enter, try to revive her, and pronounce her dead. She saw the police walking around the apartment and finding her insulin. I could hear and see everything perfectly…. I was able to see everything all at the same time, regardless of where it took place. Walls of brick or wood did not seem to hinder my vision at all. AND "when I suddenly found myself watching the police and the paramedics work on my body from somewhere near the ceiling," paramedics referred to her as dead, but she witnessed this all. "I was not dead. I could hear and see everything perfectly…. I was able to see everything all at the same time, regardless of where it took place. Walls of brock or wood did not seem to hinder my vision at all." She also described her body that she observed as 'a lump of clay' that she thought not worth reviving. She told them, 'leave it alone' to the EMTs but they did not hear her.[109] 'Instantly I was no longer floating in the air above them. I was standing at the edge of a beautiful silver lake.'[110]

xl) Scott Drummond "The next thing I knew, I was standing in the air above my body. Every ounce of pain was suddenly, inexplicably gone. I felt no fear, no anxiety, no stress.

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[107] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light*, 28,29,34,36.
[108] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 25.
[109] Menet, *There Is No Death,* 24-25.
[110] Menet, *There Is No Death,* 25.

Instead, all I felt was tremendous peace. Imagine it, to feel complete and total peace? I'd felt nothing remotely like it in my life. More than being simply happy or calm in the way we experience it in mortality, it was a pure and utter otherworldly peace. Below me, I saw the doctor working calmly and diligently. The poor nurse had a very different response. Distressed and panicked, she abruptly fled the room. I could hear the fear in her voice when she lamented loudly and clearly that she'd killed me. Soon the room flooded with medical staff desperately trying to revive me. It's an odd thing to observe your own body laid out on a table, people rushing about to bring you back to life, and the raucous sounds of alarms and urgent orders."[111]

"Now I could observe the entire procedure from above and to the right of my head. I could even count the stitches he had made"[112]

xli) Chad Daybell jumped into a reservoir in 1985 as a dare with friends: "When I finally hit the water it felt like I had slammed into concrete. A shock went through my entire body, and I saw a while flash of light….my spirit was partially out of my body...caused my spirit to pop out through my head. "During those few moments I could see on the other side of the Veil I saw an endless white plain in all directions…I also heard a deep rich melody…the pain I felt a few moments earlier was gone. There was a soothing warmth around me, and I also felt tangible energy particles of knowledge rushing toward me from all directions… As he surfaced the water his spirit returned to the body."[113]

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[111] Scott Drummond, and Ponton, Sandy. *What Dying Taught Me About Living* (Covenant Books, 2023), Chapter Four. (no page numbers in this book).

[112] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me About Living*, ch.4.

[113] Daybell, *Living on the Edge,* 2.

xli) Ranelle Wallace saw herself on the gurney below at the hospital after her plane crash and "I looked and saw a person lying on a hospital bed surrounded by doctors and nurses." She hardly recognized herself.[114]

xliii) Jeff Olsen had two episodes of autoscopy "I found myself walking, or by some other method moving at will, but in a very different place. The bubble of light was gone. I felt the hustle and unrest of the hallway of a hospital. I watched the doctors and nurses as they went about their duties. I moved with ease all around them. I realized none of them were aware of me. They could not see me, but-wow-could I see them!"[115] After returning to his body he felt great pain again and left." I continued to rise above the scene as my body became smaller and smaller. It was as if I were high above the room, looking down at myself. Everything was dark except my quivering body on the bed. It looked as if there were a spotlight on my convulsing physical form, which continued to become smaller and smaller as I rose higher and higher above the entire scene. It was like I had broken through a time barrier somehow and was now standing in a garden." He then witnesses Jesus' suffering in the Garden of Gethsemane. "My consciousness raced back to my hospital room and into my body."[116] As for pain: **"**I realized all the pain was gone. I was fine; there was no pain at all."[117]

xliv) Kim Rives "I felt a peace and calm descend over and engulf me. I felt vitality and strength. I felt energy. The air I was breathing seemed filled with love; somehow more pure than what had surrounded me before. I tried to get my bearings. "Where was I?" I was no longer in the hydraulic bed crowding Mom's den. My spirit searched for the meaning of this newfound peace

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[114] Wallace, *The Burning Within,* 88, 114.
[115] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts*, 35.
[116] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 51.
[117] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 31.

and vitality. Then I saw something. It was a form below me ... I was hovering above a body ... looking closer. . .I realized it was my body… The still form lay in the bed below me. I could hardly recognize the body as being me. The bald head rested white and motionless against the bed sheet while my spirit, the real me, hovered near the den's ceiling." AND her PAIN also ceased. "The pain stopped instantly. I was no longer writhing in agony."[118]

xlv) Angie Fenimore 'Felt passing over to a different sphere tremendous energy enfolded me with a deep rumble my soul was disconnecting from my body with a hum' [119]

xlvi) Suzanne Freeman "On the surgery table she felt paralyzed when asked to scoot up…." Then I was out of my body and looking down at myself from the far-left corner of the room… I knew that it wasn't normal for me to be up that high."[120]

xlvii) Denise Mendenhall "I looked back at my body"[121]

(xlviii) Lance Richardson – "I saw my body lying in the hospital bed. I saw the room and equipment." Randy met him again Pain disappeared. Lance followed him through the Veil back into Paradise.][122] He is allowed to visit his family in spirit.

(lii)Randy and Lance watch his wife and children back on Earth "we were flying through space and time." He witnessed his kids in their classrooms and could read their thoughts. He sat next to his wife who was driving. He 'spoke' to her. Later on, she remembered the feeling he was close by that day. B) He visits his father, a state senator in ID senate. He witnesses his Dad and all.[123]

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[118] Rives, *Walk Thru Heaven,* 94.
[119] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,* 81.
[120] Freeman, *Led by the Hand of Christ*, 36-37.
[121] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 25.
[122] Richardson, *The Message*, 88, 95,111.
[123] Richardson, *The Message*, 111.

(2) Lance tells his Dad to give him a blessing. While Dad does not hear this, the 'thought' actually prompts him to arrange a blessing. So, Lance's communication created an inspiration in his father's mind. [124]

(xlix) Julie Rowe "I felt my spirit rise up out of my body. I found myself standing next to the bed looking down at my motionless form. I looked out the window and into the night sky just as the sun was beginning to rise. I felt my spirit slowly rise toward the ceiling of the hospital room. I rose higher and higher ..."[125]

(l) Ralph Jensen "{Whilst unconscious he is acutely aware with clarity and sees everything that transpires…which later those present corroborate.] Yet now I could see everyone and hear everything that was happening. I became aware that I could see through the walls [126]of the apartment. I could see outside the walls, and I could see Lisa in her --. room with Buddy."

(li) Mark Pedersen "I found myself rising out of my body. At first, I sat up in my belly and then I stood up. My feet were floating a foot above the ground. In a few minutes I discovered how to move about, and I took up a position in the upper comer of the room."[127]

(lii) Jane Moe How is this possible? If I'm down there, how can I also be looking at myself from above?"[128] [129]

(3) INDIFFERENCE TO THE BODY

i) Mother of Professor Hudson before 1967 – after accidentally taking too many pills she lost consciousness "She heard a scream… and she ran to the bedroom to see what it was, and

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[124] Richardson, *The Message*, 111.
[125] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 10.
[126] Which other lady NDEr also had an OBE and went through walls?
[127] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 78.
[128] Moe, *Visions of Heaven,* 4.
[129] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 5.

she saw her body sprawled on the bed. It didn't shock her at all. She likened it to an old coat that she had grown fond of and that she had just shed. She didn't particularly want to go back to it, but she felt that if she left the room that she could never return. As she was thinking about this her husband ran into the room and it shocked her that he didn't see her. He went directly to the body. She tried to talk to him, but he didn't hear her."[130]

ii) Durham 'I also knew a "part of me" was being left on the gurney, but at that moment I felt a great indifference toward it.' [131]

iii) Olsen "I encountered some poor soul on a small hospital bed, broken and badly damaged. I didn't feel his emotion or perceive anything about him. He was a wreck of a body, a heap of flesh as if he were dead. I stood looking at the body, assessing the damage. It was so pitiful to look at, yet I felt no energy from the broken heap I was 38 - looking at. There was an intense sadness in my heart while looking at it. It was so empty, so lifeless. 38 I moved closer to look at the face of the man. I noticed the detail of his whiskers and how his sideburns fell along his ears. I looked at the mouth and nose, and that's when the realization hit me, I suddenly recognized who was lying there. It was me! That was my body. I was standing there looking at myself (or more specifically at the body I was no longer in."[132]

(4) TUNNEL/ JOURNEY /DOOR

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[130] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10. p. 4. 'Departed Spirits returning to their bodies. An Overdose.' Collected 1971 in Provo UT Collector Mrs. LaVon Cole Informant Charles F. Cole aged 22 and husband of LaVon. Charles heard this story in 1967 in a class on the BYU campus by Professor Hudson. This experience happened to Professor Hudson's mother during a serious illness.

[131] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 25.

[132] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts*, 37.

i) Marba Peck Hale's grandmother Mrs. Van Holden Peck 1878 - "She said she felt herself being drawn into a whirlpool-like tunnel. Then she saw a very bright light."[133]

ii) Ella Jensen 1891 who was ill and 'died for three hours, and whose VTE was recounted by President LeRoi Snow who was a witness described that she entered a large hall, which could be similar to a tunnel. "I entered a large hall. It was so long that I could not see the end of it. It was filled with people."[134]

iii) Flora Ann Mayer c. 1900 "She said she felt herself being drawn into a whirlpool-like tunnel. Then she saw a very bright light. A man came from that light and acted as a guide for her."[135]

iv) Hugh Nibley 1933 – had a VTE during an appendix operation in Loma Linda Ca in 1936 when he 'technically died' until resuscitated. His description of going through a 'tube' resembled a tunnel. He says "Then all of a sudden down this thing like a tube, you know, you get sucked down this thing and you come out. All I wanted was to know whether there was anything on the other side, and when I came out there."[136]

Gibson 1993 p. 40 "Then I saw this darkness; I felt as though I were traveling through the darkness…in a sort of tunnel" and p. 92 "There was a tunnel that went down and off to the right

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[133] Marba Peck Hale, 1928- *Marba P. Hale Papers.* Manuscript. MS 21208 (1000010223535) Folder 6 My Grandmother Peck's experience of Dying. VTE in 1878. Written 1985 by Marba Peck Hale, grandmother Van Holden Peck. Church History Library.

[134] "The Improvement Era : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive," Internet Archive, December 19, 2011, https://archive.org/details/improvementera32012unse/page/972/mode/2up.

Snow, L. C. "Raised from the Dead." *Improvement Era* 32, no. 12 (1929).972-980 This story was also found in a source that came down via oral tradition. BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Recounted by William Sheffield, BYU student 1964.

[135] Marba Peck Hale, Papers [ca. 2000], folder 6 (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

[136] Hugh Nibley, 1985. "The faith of an observer: Conversations with Hugh Nibley." In *Eloquent Witness: Nibley on Himself, Others, and the Temple,* edited by Stephen D. Ricks. The Collected Works of Hugh Nibley 17, 148–76. Salt Lake City, UT: Deseret Book, 2008,https://bookofMormoncentral.org/blog/what-did-hugh-nibley-s-near-death-experience-teach-him-about-the-purpose-of-life.

and that's where the light as coming from." And p. 121 "I found myself being drawn toward a bright light that was down the tunnel" and 172 "There was no fear, and there was a light at the end of the tunnel. The sides of the tunnel though had some light, I could see the walls." Gibson p.160

v) Ricks Not all VTE involve death like NDE some like Russell Ricks was a STE as a baptized 8 year old child., He had prayed to see the Spirit World. He describes a spinning. As it spun, it seemed my body, or perhaps my spirit (I'm not sure which), rose up from my spinning bed and continued to ascend upward into the darkness of the night… I sensed a tiny beam of light in the distance above me. As I drew closer to the light, it expanded and continued to increase in brightness until it filled the entirety of the space around me."[137]

vi) Eadie The Tunnel "Presence of an enormous energy…A deep rumbling, rushing sound began to fill the room…I heard chimes, or distant bells, tinkling in the background- a beautiful sound I'll never forget….I was gently drawn up and into a great whirling black mass. I felt as if I had been swallowed up by an enormous tornado." She felt herself moving through the darkness but also felt a pleasant sense of wellbeing and calmness." 'The speed became so incredible that light years could not measure it...but the peace and tranquility also increased.' I was aware of other people and animals traveling with me but at a distance' No fear - process of healing taking place [138]

vii) Daybell had a second VTE while under a large wave at a San Diego beach in 1993 "I found myself in the proverbial tunnel of light. It wasn't a bright white light, but more like a yellow heat lamp. It felt like I was wrapped in a warm blanket, and I felt extremely happy."[139]

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[137] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 19-20.
[138] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light*, 37,38,39.
[139] Daybell *Living on the Edge,* 110.

viii) Ranelle Wallace "At that moment I was sucked into a narrow tube, and I began flying through it feet first. The tube was extremely tight, and I became more frightened because it almost felt like my body was being sucked inside out. My speed was tremendous-indescribable. Nothing on Earth has ever gone that fast, nothing could. It felt as if I were whizzing past galaxies, but the colors and lights were right next to me, almost brushing against me, and my fears mounted. Then I heard voices. It seemed people were traveling beside me somehow," … "A dot of light appeared far off in front of me. It was just a pinpoint, a tiny speck in the distance, but its brilliance distinguished it from all other lights around me and I instinctively pressed towards it. Emanating from it was a love and hope and peace that my soul hungered for I wanted, I needed this brilliant, radiant light. The black tube took the shape of a tunnel now, opening up as I neared its end. The light burst forth before me, filling everything with brightness, and I was coming upon it impossibly fast.' [140]

ix) Rives had this returning experience "I was propelled forward at the speed of light into a dark, warm and cozy tunnel. It was filled with heavenly love. I wanted to stay in the tunnel and bask in the sensation. I saw a man crouched over, groping in his mind. He too was making the decision of whether he should return to his Earthly home or stay in Heaven. I wondered why he was being allowed to decide because I was being whisked back to mortality rather quickly. Ahead, I could see a large cylindrical light, which I would discover was a portal to deliver me back to my body. Arriving in the spare room at my mother's house, I looked down at my still, dead body that was lying upon the bed. My head was bald. The body was unresponsive and ashen white. I felt repulsed by it, yet tender feelings swept over me as I realized how well it had served me through 38 long years. After surveying the setting, I laid down, face up, on my still

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[140] Wallace, *The Burning Within*, 1, 94-5.

frame. In an instant, my spirit and my body reunited. The instant I was nestled and locked back in; the most horrendous pain gripped me. Every fiber shook with bone chilling cold. My body felt as icy as I imagined the Antarctic to be. I shook so badly that I thought my kidneys were going to be knocked out of my back. Nausea overpowered me. Sweat poured from my face, yet I was so cold that I felt my limbs might snap in two if I moved them. I began to scream, "I'm cold! I'm cold! I'm cold!" [141]

x) Angie Fenimore "Then came a *whoosh!* I was sucked further into darkness by an unseen undefined power." I was flying upright at warp speed. I sensed I was going faster than any man-made aircraft could fly. [142]

Freeman "It's amazing to travel with the Lord. With him leading me, it was a very smooth and easy transition. It's like we never really moved our feet, but in the wink of an eye we were among the Jaredites,"[143]

xi) Jane Moe saw a golden door. ", I see a door in front of me. It's slightly ajar, with a brilliant light bursting from the opening. I've never seen anything, brighter more magnificent, and I feel compelled to draw nearer to see what's on the other side of the door I know that whatever it is, it's good. Actually, much better than good. I know I must be in heaven. [144]

xii) Amy Call 2003 had an allergic reaction to medication. "A sensation of suction coming from the top of her head like a vacuum sucked 'her' out into an open portal so that she was out of her body." From the portal she found herself in a kind of waiting room with some others, some of whom had committed suicide. She knew she didn't belong there and moved on to

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[141] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 142-143.
[142] Fenimore, Beyond the Darkness, 93.
[143] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 85.
[144] Moe, *Visions of Heaven,* 4.

another brighter place where groups of people were meeting and trying to find others they knew. [145]

xiii) Pedersen 2004 "my spirit moved through a tunnel toward a light after I left my body… When I stepped out of the tunnel I watched it shrink to the size of a thread… I walked toward the lighted end of the tunnel in a direction away from my body. When I got to the end of the tunnel I found myself in a pastoral field surrounding a plaza that was outside the entrance to a very large city."[146] In another VTE "I felt pain when I left my body this time. The feeling was as if I had been ripped out of my body and thrown around. I saw shadowy figures and heard unintelligible voices calling to me but I was alone. Before I could step very far away from my body a tunnel appeared in the wall of my hospital room. The entrance looked similar to a subway tunnel. The inside of the tunnel was dark except for a pinpoint of light far down at one end… Upon reaching the light at the end of the tunnel a portal opened into a room"[147]

(5) GUIDES AND ESCORTS FOR THE DYING AND DEATHBED VISITORS

i) Lorenzo Dow Young 1826 VTE – met and shown the heavens by a guide.[148] His guide told him "Now let us go." To begin the tour and repeated these words when he showed him each new level in the heavens. His guide hurried him, pointed out things to see and at the end told him that he had to return to Earth.[149]

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[145] Amy Call in Ch 15, David Sunfellow, *Love the Person You're with: Life-Changing Insights from the Most Compelling Near-Death Experiences Ever Recorded*, CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2016,https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qX803D_cofI. KMVT, 2015 Present! Amy Call's Near-Death Experience, https://ndestories.org/amy-call/.

[146] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 3.

[147] Pedersen *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 96.

[148] Lorenzo Dow Young.

[149] Lorenzo Dow Young.

ii) Heroine Randall 1830 “Then a personage of beauty received her into his charge and conducted her beyond the confines of Earth, even she realized to a great distance, until they came without the walls of a beautiful city, one that shone in splendor.”[150]

iii) In the church history catalog, we find a family history record. **Harriet Salvina Beal** who was very sick on her deathbed in **1852** aged 16 said that she met her dead mother. “Lying in my bed I was overjoyed to see my mother there by me. I was not afraid and began telling her of all that had happened since her death.”[151] While her mother interacted with her, her other relatives did not seem to notice her presence there. “They did not seem to notice me at all. My aunts, although I had known them well, did not act as though I was there.” Her mother walked without her feet touching the ground...She saw her deceased brother William Francis, who was buried on the plains, playing on the golden bedroom floor and with him the twins.[152]

iv) John Peterson 1857 “a visitor suddenly made his appearance in the room, and standing by the couch on which I lay, placed his hand on my head and asked if I was ready to go? "I answered, 'Yes'; and just at that instant I seemed to stand upon the floor, my body lying on the bed. I looked around to see if my father could see us, but he seemed to have been too interested in reading to have noticed us. We started off on our journey through space, seemingly with the rapidity of lightning (for I can make no other comparison). I asked my guide who he was. He answered he was one of the guardian angels sent to bring the dead."[153]

v) Harriet Ovard Lee 1860 “my spirit was out of my body .... I heard a voice calling me by name, saying, 'Harriet,' three times, 'Come, I am waiting.' ... I saw my husband and all the

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[150] Heroine Randall.

[151] Cora Anna Beal Peterson, 1880-1952 Biography of William Beal, 7-10, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/326cad1e-be72-4dd1-9b68-f025db909248/0/14.

[152] Harriet S. Beal.

[153] John Peterson.

people in the room, some of them crying and wringing their hands over my lifeless body, at the sight of which I shuddered. "The voice said, 'Come,' and I saw a personage whom I followed ... and we passed out at the door into what appeared to be unlimited space. Again, my guide called me by name, commanding me to follow him, which I did, and we kept moving forward and l felt as light as a feather and as free as a bird on the wing, all pain and uneasiness having entirely left me."[154]

vi) John Powell 1867 "My spirit then left my body and went with my guide . . .[155]

vii) Eliza Ursenbach died in **1872** left two children. **Eliza Ursenbach** died in **1872** "In her passing she was fully conscious that her spirit was leaving her body-that my father, who had previously died, had come for her. When Eliza Ursenbach passed away, her departed husband met her and served as her guide to the Spirit World.[156]

viii) Marba Peck Hale's grandmother Mrs. Van Holden Peck 1878 "A man came from that light and acted as a guide for her."[157]

ix) Peter E. Johnson 1898 - 'I beheld a personage,' and asked him 'Who are you?' '"I am your guardian angel; I have been following you constantly while on Earth.'[158]

X0 Loisie M. Goates 1890 "two personages came. One was made known to me to be that of my husband's mother whom I had never seen before… was taken to a place heavenly to

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[154] Harriet Ovard Lee.

[155] Marlene Bateman Sullivan, "5 Insights Into the Spirit World From Those Who Have Seen It - LDS Living," LDS Living, January 4, 2023, https://www.ldsliving.com/5-insights-into-the-spirit-world-from-those-who-have-seen-it/s/82344.

[156] Joseph Heinerman, *Spirit World Manifestations* (Magazine Printing and Publishing, 1978), 113-14.

[157] Marba Peck Hale, 1928- *Marba P. Hale Papers.* Manuscript. MS 21208 (1000010223535) Folder 6 My Grandmother Peck's experience of Dying. VTE in 1878. Written 1985 by Marba Peck Hale, grandmother Van Holden Peck. Church History Library.

[158] Peter E. Johnson.

me: when I entered the building with two guides the music being lovely… my Guide visited me several times stood by my bed and all ways talked in tongs [tongues].”[159]

xi) Earl Stowell before 1893 Although I never saw or heard them, two beings placed themselves on each side of me, and I knew I was to go with them.[160]

xii) Flora Ann Mayer's c. 1900 account states, "A man came from that light and acted as a guide for her."[161]

xiii) Hannah Adeline Savage 1900 “There was a guide close by my side, and he talked to me and showed me the spirits.” “While very sick there was a personage [who] stood by the side of my bed and told me my recovery was made shure [sic]."[162]

xiv) Mary Hyde Woolf 1914 saw her escort when she passed away. The account states, 'After the spirit withdrew from the body she saw a Guide by her side who said to her, 'Come with me.'" [163]

xv) Archie J. Graham 1918 “I contracted influenza which was raging over the country .... One night ... I was surprised to hear someone speak my name. I paid no attention. Then again, I heard it. The third time it was so clear and distinct that I turned over to see what was wanted. A messenger, a man in white, stood before me. He was about five feet nine inches tall and had a most penetrating smile. His presence seemed to illuminate the room. His voice was kind and gentle yet commanding. '"Come with me,' he said .... I arose from my bed and followed him, leaving my body behind. We had not gone far, when he asked if I knew where I was. I told him I

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[159] Loisie M. Goates.

[160] Earl Stowell.

[161] Marba Peck Hale, *Papers* [ca. 2000] Folder 6 (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

[162] Hannah Adeline Savage, *Record of Hannah Adeline Savage* (Provo, Utah: L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University), 3-5.

[163] Zina Y. Card, "Manifestation to Mrs. Mary Hyde Woolf" *The Relief Society Magazine* 8 (August 1921), 492-93.

felt as if I were in heaven because his influence seemed *so* heavenly. 'Come then,' he said. 'We will follow this path and I will show you some of the things you have longed to know and to see."[164]

xvi) Heber J. Grant 1920 reported that he had a dream that his deceased wife came to take their seven-year-old son, after losing their five-year-old also beforehand. This dream, which happened an hour before his last son died of hip disease, led to great anguish but his faith led him to accept the inevitable and allow his deceased wife to escort the boy to the afterlife. As the boy died, he felt the presence of his deceased wife there. He described a feeling of a sweet, peaceful heavenly presence in his home.[165]

xvii) Herman Stulz 1921 was a sick German soldier wounded in WW1 I saw a strange man who was clothed in a robe, standing at the foot of my bed. He greeted me with a smile and invited me to come along with him.[166]

xviii) 1977 Sellesa Hurd Snarr "my great-great-great grandmother, her name was Anna Kalowski, she came to get me. She said "my name is Anna. I've come here to help you." So, she took me and we went up to heaven."[167]

xix) Elder David B. Haight said "I was conscious of two persons in the distance on a hillside, one standing on a higher level than the other. Detailed features were not discernible. [168]

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[164] Archie J. Graham.

[165] *Improvement Era,* June 1940, pp. 330, 383).

[166] Herman Stulz.

[167] Sellesa Hurd Snarr. Idaho LDS age 46. Written in 2016 by the collector, Jody Hansen, who is a BYU student is in her ward. Link to her information:
https://lib.byu.edu/search/byu/record/cdm.folklore.278?holding=3n6rslxlozi5aqe7
https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/folklore/id/278

[168] The Sacrament—and the Sacrifice by Elder David B. Haight *Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles 1989 April,*https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1989/10/the-sacrament-and-the-sacrifice?lang=eng.

xx) 1932 Alvin Giles had a ruptured appendix and after surgery there were complications. His brother Leland recounted that: "At home he asked about some relatives who he's never met, nor had discussed. He said, "I saw and talked with them during the time I was in the hospital".[169]

xxi) J. R. Williams before 1953? "At last, the doctor pronounced me dead. My spirit left my body; a messenger came and took me by the hand, and we went on a long journey."[170]

xxii) 1954 Mrs. Anna Smith was near to death from pneumonia, she said: "She was in a place more beautiful than she has ever before witnessed. As she marveled at the beauty around her, she saw a man dressed all in white. He magnified a Christ-like personage. A short distance from her stood many friends and family members who had passed on before."[171]

xxiii) Tooley Recognized old friend met by old, deceased friends Larry Talbot. He is sent as a guide and reeducator[172]

xxiv) Eadie Three men suddenly appeared by my side… a kind of glow emanated from them… 'They had been with me for eternities they said' They were also there upon her return to the body "I began to see images in my mind of a time long ago, of an existence before my life on Earth, of my relationship with these men before." They explain that they are her guardian angels [173]

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[169] BYU Provo Special Collections. FA 02, Box 6, folder 7 Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. *Passing through the Veil.* Verl L Giles whose father Leland Ray Giles from Arco Idaho told him from memory.

[170] J. R. Williams.

[171] BYU Provo Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 folder 7 box 6. Anna Eileen Sofenson Smith by James C. Garrick – related to him by Deanna Smith Sudweeks, daughter of Anna Smith.

[172] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 989.

[173] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light,* 30,31,123.

xv) Rives "I sensed another's presence; a messenger dressed in white who stood beside me. Without a word, he beckoned me to follow him. I did not know or recognize him, but felt he had my best interest at heart. Out of curiosity, I followed."[174] **Rives** also describes 'a visitation from my grandmother'[175]

xvi) Purvis had only a brief experience of meeting a family guide. "In this moment, I felt at peace and did not have any worries. I saw my dad (who passed away in 1974) when I was walking—I don't know where I was walking; I was just walking around. He told me that I had to leave and that I had three sons to raise. He smiled and then disappeared. When I woke up,"[176]

xvii) Drummond "Another key moment after I left my body came when I realized I wasn't alone where I stood in the air. There was someone else standing near me—another unseen person observing the melee below. I couldn't see this person, as he was in the blind spot behind and to the right of me… While standing in the field, the guide who was with me in surgery and who had escorted me to this new place, admonished me to never look back."[177]

xviii) Freeman was guided by Christ himself "Christ put his arm around my shoulders in a brotherly hug filled with love, then led me down a white pathway that curved like a stream meandering through lush country meadows."[178]

xix)Mendenhall's guide was Jesus.[179]

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[174] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 94.
[175] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 65.
[176] Purvis in Drummond *What Dying Taught Me*, 1.
[177] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me,* Ch.4.
[178] Freeman *Led by the Hand,* 57.
[179] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 5.

xxx) Richardson - Guide his dead cousin Randy who had died 20 years previously[180] Randy was asked to be Lance's escort.

xxxi) Rowe "met by a very kind older gentleman, John. He is one of my distant ancestors." "I was soon met by an older gentleman with blond hair and blue eyes who introduced himself as John. He told me he was one of my ancestors, and that he was there to help me. I immediately recognized him as someone I knew, but I could not tell you exactly who he is or how I came to know him. I do know that he is a ministering angel and one of my many guardian angels. He is the same man who gave me the "tour" beyond the Veil that I am about to share with you," [181]

xxxii) R. Jensen "Before my head fell back, I had noticed a man standing quietly at the foot of my bed…. dressed in white. Peace and a love beyond comprehension shined from the face of my visitor. I was filled with a tranquility that I cannot explain. All worry left me. Looking around me and surveying my situation, I realized that my spirit was no longer in my body. Just then, I noticed another man standing motionless next to the first, also dressed in white. Reassured by their presence, calmness enveloped me."[182]

xxxiii) Amy Call had an unnamed guide[183]

xxxiv) Pedersen didn't always have a guide "During the first moments outside my body I saw no other spirits. not even my Angels."[184]

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[180] Richardson, *The Message*, 66. -- Jack Alread 1908 in rainstorm leaned on a mule Struck by lightning looked down from the sky and saw himself and the whole scene from above (OBE) He saw his brother praying over his body and woke up 6 days later He said he was up in the air felt the raindrops passing through him and he felt them like an electrical tingle as they passed through him. He was Mormon.

[181] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow* 5,11.

[182] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 6.

[183] Call, YouTube.

[184] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 78.

xxxv) Bryan Young's daughter Holland had a VTE when battling brain cancer 2012-13 She reported that three angels were ministering to her, they were ancestral spirits of her great grandparents. And then Uncle Nelson helped her adjust to the Spirit World. It is a beautiful place.[185]

(6) WHITE LIGHT FULL OF LOVE/ LIGHT/ PEACE JOY BLISS

i) Loisie M. Goates 1890 I was told to follow a light that looked to me to be like a star at first when it soon grew to be a Brilient [sic] Light."[186]

ii) Charles D. Evans, a patriarch, had a vision in 1893 to my surprise a light appeared in my room which seemed to be soft and silvery as if diffused from a northern star. He adds that even though it was midnight 'yet all was light and bright and warm as an Italian landscape at noon, but the heat was softer and more subdued.'[187]

iii) Lerona Wilson 1915 in the fall of 1915 sick from sepsis, says "My room suddenly became lighted brightly with a soft, white light, then a number of my deceased relatives came into my room."[188]

iv) Bodies seem to emit light - A body transmitting light. (Gibson 1994 p. 136, 180)

v) Frederick Babble 1920 "All at once he was enveloped in a brilliant white light. "'I have brought you back into my presence,' said the voice in the midst of the dazzling white light,

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[185] Young, Bryan Kent. *Meant for Heaven: A Little Girl's Journey to Paradise*. (CFI, An imprint of Cedar Fort, 2017). 50, 94.

[186] Loisie M. Goates.

[187] The Contributor v.15 1893 The Vision of Patriarch Charles D Evans (1893) Charles D. Evans - Vision of The Future by Glen W. Chapman Dec. 2000 (Taken from the book "Visions of The Latter Days" 6th printing 1998) Pioneer Press, 3332 Ft Union Blvd. Salt Lake CY Utah, 84121.

[188] "My Testimony Concerning Temple Work," By Lerona A. Wilson, Relief society magazine, vol. 3 no. 2 Feb. 1916, 82-4, https://archive.org/stream/reliefsocietymag03reli#page/82/mode/2up).

'because you have so greatly feared the transition which you call death. You now perceive that there is nothing to fear,**"**[189]

vi) My grandmother appeared within this wonderful pure light. (Sorensen and Willmore 1988 p.37)[190]

vii) Charles R. Woodbury 1954 – "While I was in the L.D.S. Hospital in 1954, I was very weak. One

day I saw a real bright light, brighter than noonday. In the light I saw people, men, and women dressed in light clothing…"Everyone was so happy.""[191]

viii) 1977 Sellesa Hurd Snarr "I remember it was like a big light, and we went really fast through this big light. It was really quick."[192]

ix) Ricks 1966 VTE/ STE of light [193]

x) Tooley – 1972 – "My God help me" "I began ascending again and passed through the ceiling. Suddenly a brilliant white light burst upon me. It was brighter than the sun and more intense. I was being pulled toward the light. "As I stared intently into the light, I could faintly see facial features but nothing else.[194] "A soft loving voice spoke to me from the light, and a

[189] Frederick Babble.

[190] Sorenson, Michelle R, and Dr. David R Willmore. *The Journey Beyond Life*. Sandy, UT: Sounds of Zion, 1988, https://archive.org/details/journeybeyondlif00sore.

[191] Charles R. Woodbury, Faith Promoting Experiences of Patriarch Charles R. *Woodbury* (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

[192] Sellesa Hurd Snarr. Idaho LDS age 46. Written in 2016 by the collector, Jody Hansen, who is a BYU student is in her ward. See: https://lib.byu.edu/search/byu/record/cdm.folklore.278?holding=3n6rslxlozi5aqe7 https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/folklore/id/278.

[193] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* viii.

[194] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 933.

peaceful calm came over me. I felt I was being comforted. I also felt an unconditional love directed to me.[195]

xi) Eadie - She met a being of light made of light that flows out of him[196]. Love and knowledge are in the light. "You don't just see the light, it embraces you. It is a full experience; seeing, knowing, feeling." [197] She is embraced by the light "I saw a pinpoint of light in the distance. The black mass around me… took on more of the shape of a tunnel." "As I got closer the light became more brilliant – brilliant beyond any description; far more brilliant than the sun – and I knew that no Earthly eyes in their natural state could look upon this light without being destroyed."[198]

xii) Durham 'I SEE A LIGHT' *[199]*', I realized that the light was traveling toward me just as I was moving toward it, and it was moving at a great speed. As we came closer together, I saw rays of light filter out through the halos, and I realized that there was a personality to this light. I also felt an immense amount of love from it, a different kind of love than I had ever felt before, love that was completely overwhelming. And wonder of all wonders, I knew that I was being welcomed to come closer.' [200] It spoke to her saying 'Through me you have Eternal Life." And then she saw Jesus walk out of the light.[201]

xiii) Tom Gibson 1992 "I felt completely at peace, as if there were no problems which were of concern. It wasn't that there were no challenges-it's just that everything seemed to be

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[195] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 933.
[196] Identifies this as male gender.
[197] The Astroboy9 Channel YouTube 2011 "Oprah Winfrey Interviews Betty Eadie."
[198] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light,* 40.
[199] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 25.
[200] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 27.
[201] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 29-30.

under control. It was such a wonderful feeling that I never wanted to lose it… I didn't want to leave the tremendous feeling of love and peace that was."[202]

xiv) Moe "I'm engulfed in a bright light that caresses and soothes me… My body and my soul are engulfed in a love so intense that I begin to weep tears of joy. " (4) Feeling love was intense and this overwhelming feeling was more important than what she 'saw'. 'It races through my body like electricity and at the same time fills me so fully chat I think I'II burst.' [203](6)

xv) Ricks place of pure joy and happiness,[204]

xvi) Eadie - According to Eadie, Jesus taught pluralism, and that belonging to other faiths did not really matter. "What counts is that love is the ultimate. We all need to love each other". [205]

xvii) Rives "I felt vibrant free and alive. I felt like dancing and singing."[206]

xviii) Wallace "The key is love, "All creation springs from God's love, … I was being filled with love in order to become a source of love." "Love is the power of life." [207]

xix) Drummond "It was then that I understood I was dead, and I wasn't coming back. And yet I still felt no fear, only peace."[208]

xx) Fenimore "I was being immersed in pure knowledge pure love."[209]

xxi) Jeff Olsen was involved in a car accident in which his wife and son died in 1997. "I was gone. Gone from the scene of the accident. I slipped from the nightmare of the crash into the

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[202] Arvin S. Gibson, *Margaret and Marshall Gibson, An Old-fashioned Love Story: A Biography* (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).
[203] Moe, *Visions of Heaven,* 4,6.
[204] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 23
[205] The Astroboy9 Channel YouTube 2011 "Oprah Winfrey Interviews Betty Eadie."
[206] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 95.
[207] Wallace, *The Burning Within,* 104,105,117.
[208] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me About Living*, 1, Ch. 4.
[209] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,* 123.

quietness of pure nothing. I was encircled with light, a bright-white light that seemed to be energized with pure, unconditional love. I was calm. Peace infused this almost tangible light."[210] "This was a place of joy."[211]

xxii) Lance Richardson - He realized he was the son of the Father. 'Incredible peace…permeated every fiber of my being." "The love was so consuming I felt I would never want to leave again. [212]

xxiii) Wayman had belonged to an FLDS polygamous group called The Work and had left it before these experiences. He was suspicious about the authenticity of Joseph Smith, yet his VTE confirmed many aspects of his previous faith and knowledge he received was that all religions contain truth even the FLDS. When he met with God, he learned that "God then told him to love joseph Smith not because of his fake persona but because he had awakened to this same eternal love that I was now experiencing. He told Clayne that he was sent to this life to heal what is broken… He understood that JS had expressed his own version of love and some of God's essence had leaked into the book of Mormon.[213]

xxiv) R. Jensen "Feeling the pure, uninhibited, and infinite love of Christ, as that penetrated every fiber of my being… that infinite love,"[214]

(7) BLACKNESS/ THE VOID

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[210] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts* 31.
[211] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts* 31.
[212] Richardson, *The Message*, 56,57.
[213] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love,* 331,356,357.
[214] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 9.

i) Jennie Schnakenberg 1896 – "After arriving in the Spirit World, Jennie passed through a strange and terrible darkness before coming to a world so beautiful she began to dance and sing praises to God."[215]

ii) 1963 Sheila Heinle's aunt "was sick with blood cancer…In hospital she heard voices – everything was dark. Then she saw a light and moved toward it. She could hear others in the darkness, not her family at the bedside. She moved closer to the light. Someone said to her – YOU MUST GO BACK YOUR TIME IS NOT YET! She came to. The doctor said she had died."[216]

iii) Clayne Edward Wayman had two VTEs, one in 2016 and one in 2017 when he was about 34 years old. He drank peyote tea and in the second experience his body had a bad reaction, and he came close to death. He experienced the black void the second time, "My life was over, I fell into the blackness, no breath…. My body left behind."[217] In this experience he said that he: "Drifted off into a formless world "In a tunnel I saw an uncountable number of eyes staring at me. They had dark purple around them with layers of colors. I glided past them and floated to the top of the tunnel toward a pure white light." [218]

iv) Fenimore "Where was I? I was immersed in darkness." [219] Aware of standing on solid ground but nothing was there. She saw other teenagers. It occurred to her that they were all the suicides. Her thoughts were audible without her lips moving to speak. She saw a youth in modern clothes, black jeans, leather vest, no expression in his face, no warmth or intelligence in

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[215] Sullivan, *Gaze Into Heaven,* 80. -- Jennie Schnakenberg, letter, Mar. 25, 1993. (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

[216] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Recounted by Sheila Heinle to informant Merlene Holt 1963 They were roommates.

[217] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love,* 354, 353. (Kindle)

[218] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love,* 354.

[219] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,* 92, 112.

his eyes “Suspended in darkness, he and all the others stood fixed in a thoughtless stupor.” 93 AND the plane of darkness was quite literally spiritual "time-out," a place where I was supposed to grasp the gravity of my offenses and co pay the price. 112

v) Wallace “Immense blackness flooded over me like a rapid, dense fog. The darkness was so absolute that nothing was visible, and it seemed that nothing ever could be visible in it. Then, just as suddenly, bright, vivid lights began flashing around me, psychedelic lights that were brighter and more colorful than anything I had seen before. I -looked down at myself, and in the brilliance of the lights saw that my body looked perfectly well again. No burns, no bleeding, my hands and feet were whole. I stood in the midst of a spectacular light show, feeling absolutely whole and complete.” [220]

vi) Wayman had two VTEs, one in 2016 and one in 2017 when he was about 34 years old. He drank peyote tea and in the second experience his body had a bad reaction, and he came close to death. He experienced the black void the second time, “My life was over, I fell into the blackness, no breath…. My body left behind.”[221] In this experience he said that he, “Drifted off into a formless world “In a tunnel I saw an uncountable number of eyes staring at me. They had dark purple around them with layers of colors. I glided past them and floated to the top of the tunnel toward a pure white light.” [222]

(8) PLACE OF DESPAIR

Negative experiences are generally rarer than positive, and this was trend confirmed by the few negative experiences in my collection of VTEs.

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[220] Wallace, *The Burning Within,* 90.
[221] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love,* 354, 353.
[222] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love,* 355.

i) Harriet Ovard Lee 1860 "My guide again said, 'Look,' and the mountain kept lowering towards us, and I soon observed that it was inhabited by millions of miserable fellow-creatures. They were in great confusion, wringing their hands, holding them up, and tossing their bodies to and fro in fearful anguish. “My guide said, 'These are the spirits in prison; they know the punishment that awaits them, and they are in great distress by reason of this knowledge. They have crossed the dark river, but they have not been permitted to go near the bright and clear river which we have passed.' As he finished speaking, the mountain, with its millions of unhappy occupants, receded and gradually disappeared from our view.”[223]

ii) Archie J. Graham 1918 “They then went to a city that was so dirty and run-down that Archie asked if the people were poor. The guide said they were "benighted, ignorant, full of lust, greed and selfishness, just the same as they lived while on the Earth, steeped in the iniquities of sin. They have procrastinated their day of repentance unto death, for the bad habits formed in the flesh are much harder to overcome in the spirit, as the spirit steeped in sin without the flesh is weak, indeed, and they have a hard time to master sin here." In describing the city, Archie said, "Contention was raging in every form. The houses seemed very dilapidated .... The streets were disorderly and dirty ... there was not a sign of a tree, a flower, or a blade of grass. Everything was barren as a desert. I asked my guide if people would not surely do better on Earth if they knew what was waiting for them.” (Bateman 116) During his visit to the Spirit World, Archie Graham was shown lowly spheres where people who had not been valiant were living. He asked his guide if people on Earth would make better choices if they knew what was waiting for them in the next

[223] Harriet Ovard Lee.

life. "'That would never do,' he [the guide] said, 'as it would rob them of their full right to choose good or evil. Now they choose the thing they like most and the reward is waiting for them." [224]

iii) Tooley – - accident at work, fell of a high scaffold – "As I looked around there seemed to be an endless sea of agonized souls floating in the fog…Their pain and grief washed over me. I was experiencing the uttermost feelings of the depths of despair. Feelings of frustration and misery." He describes the feelings as torment, anguish and suffocating. Negative hellish experience[225] Cry for help leads to divine rescue. No guides here.[226]

iv) Durham As she journeyed to the light, she observed miserable Earth-bound spirits. 'From them I felt a terrible amount of confusion and anger,' [227] It seems self-imposed 'I wanted to make. them understand that all they had to do was look up-up. There was the light, and they could go to it with me. But when I tried to tell them, they ignored me completely.'[228]

v) Menet - She is sucked into a grey black place where she feels fear. She hears cries here. This place is where souls go to face the consequences of bad actions. Their own actions, not God, that put them in this dark place with no light[229]

vi) Charles R. Woodbury 1954. "I saw men and women, all dressed in dark clothing.

Contention and strife existed there. They were searching for something they couldn't find. A voice said to me, 'This is what is spoken of in the Bible as Hell, or the bottomless pit. This is the reward of those who in mortal life disobeyed the laws of God, and the laws of the land, and created appetites and took things into their bodies which were contrary to the teachings of the

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[224] Archie J. Graham, *A Visit Beyond the Veil* [n. d.].
[225] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 933.
[226] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 933.
[227] Durham , *Stand All Amazed,* 26.
[228] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 26.
[229] Menet , *There Is No Death,* 53-56

Lord and detrimental to their physical health. In mortal life they could get things to satisfy this appetite and craving. Here they cannot get anything to satisfy it. In this condition they'll remain for the 1000 years during the Millennium, before their bodies are resurrected from the grave."[230]

vii) Fenimore 'I perceived my surrounding through a telepathic intuition. The fog like mist had mass, it could be handled and shaped "It had life, this darkness, some kind of intelligence that was purely negative, even evil. It sucked at me, pulling me to react and then swallowing my reaction into fear and dread." 'I knew I was in a state of Hell." Time – no time or adherence to clocks here… "In this dark prison a day might as well be a thousand days or a thousand years." Sense of complete aloneness. "In this empty world where no connection could be made, the solitude was terrifying." "This was the place where hope came to die." – "then I heard a voice of awesome power, not loud but crashing over me like a booming wave of sound; a voice that encompassed such ferocious anger that with one word it could destroy the universe, and that also encompassed such potent and unwavering love that like the sun it could coax life from the Earth. I cowered at its force and at its excruciating words: "Is this what you really want?" "Though far more brilliant than the sun the light soothed my eyes with its deep and pure white luminescence." She sensed that the light could or would not cross the barrier into the darkness. [231]

viii) Richardson - 'Everything suddenly went black. Pitch black. A thicker blackness I had never seen.'[232]

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[230] Charles R. Woodbury.
[231] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,* 94 – 99.
[232] Richardson, *The Message*, 50.

ix) Pedersen saw unpleasant parts of the Spirit World, such as 'Babylon' ruled by 'Chaldeans' who also run a prison system for debtors who cannot repay the money spent on possession 'trips', and who try to sell the souls of men on Earth. Spirits wanted to get into bodies to experience porn or feel drink and drugs. "They employ billions of people on both sides of the Veil to support the business of human possession."[233]

(9) SATAN

i) Freeman "Negativity can bring on and harbor illness. When you allow negative thoughts to enter your mind, it brings in the adversary. Lucifer has power if we let him, but Christ's power is always greater."[234] {agrees with Denise Mendenhall here] "If you're angry, it invites evil into your life. Not only does anger invite evil, but it comes in through improper thoughts, music, videos, books, and movies, too. Some spirits are "homebound;' meaning they stay on this Earthly plane because they don't realize they have passed away… Most of the homebound spirits aren't here for any good purpose. Some don't want to look up, and some may not even know how to look up and see the light."[235]

ii) At the end of her book **Mendenhall** discusses her non typical belief that when you judge or condemn others you make yourself open to attack from devils who try to make you sick. She believes in demons and evil spirits possessing the sick. This theology is akin to Evangelical spiritual warfare ideas and has been taken by sectarian Mormons to back up unorthodox views, which in the case of the Daybell's led to murderous and evil acts.[236]

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[233] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 105,124.
[234] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 108.
[235] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 134-135.
[236] Mendenhall, *In His Arms*, 82.

iii) Ralph Jensen [About hauntings] "some persons living in mortality do have a gift to see through the "Veil," and because of this gift, they are able to see a variety of these spirits who were good, bad, and evil. [He says that the Holy Ghost can facilitate communication with spirits…but Lucifer can do this also and does this to mislead people.] These evil spirits those under Lucifer evil influence and control, consistently attempt to influence men and women toward evil."[237]

iv) Pedersen "I kept company with a group of Guardian Angels. I interacted with the Angels as they worked around the clock to protect me from other spirits that sought to possess my body… the economy of the Spirit World is driven by merchandising in the souls of men."[238] [heretical view since humans have agency and dominion over spirits]

B THE DISEMBODIED REALM

v) Marba Peck Hale's grandmother Mrs. Van Holden Peck 1878 "said it was so beautiful and peaceful there."[239]

vi) Tom Gibson 1992 - "There was another feeling that went with it. On Earth there always seems to be something . . . you know how things bother you here. There is always some problem troubling you. Either its health, or money, or people, or war, or something. That was missing there. I felt completely at peace, as if there were no problems which were of concern. It

[237] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 44.
[238] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 3.
[239] Marba Peck Hale, 1928-, *Marba P. Hale Papers.* Manuscript. MS 21208 (1000010223535) Folder 6. My Grandmother Peck's experience of Dying. VTE in 1878. Written 1985 by Marba Peck Hale, grandmother Van Holden Peck.

wasn't that there were no challenges—it's just that everything seemed to be under control. It was such a wonderful feeling that I never wanted to lose it."[240]

vii) Heber Q. Hale 1920 A sweet calmness pervaded everything[241]

viii) Jacob Hamblin The place where I was, seemed very desirable to remain in.[242]

(10) THE SPIRIT BODIES

i) Thos. S. Thomas "my soul gained full possession of my eternal body" [243]

ii) Hannah Adeline Savage 1900. "There was a guide dose by my side, and he talked to me and showed me the spirits who were beings real as we are and I saw they were very busy and my guide said to me 'you know what the Prophet Joseph said concerning all spirit' and I replied, 'yes I know, he said all spirit was matter .... '" "And now I behold these spirits are real and they were composed of so fine a matter that our Earthely [sic] eyes could not behold them unless the Lord touched the eyes of our understanding."

iii) Heber Hale 1920 The vastness of this Heavenly sphere was bewildering to the eyes of a spirit novice. Many enjoyed unrestricted vision and unimpeded action while others were visibly restricted to both vision and action[244]

iv) Herman Stulz 1921"I was released from all pains and the soreness and burning sensation one feels after such an abdominal operation. I felt like I was never sick at all and filled with a glow of health I never felt before in my life. But I wanted to make sure whether this was

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[240] Sullivan, *Gaze Into Heaven; Near-Death Experiences*, 89-90), 145.
[241] Heber Hale.
[242] Jacob Hamblin.
[243] Thomas, *Glimpse of the Future,* 59.
[244] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920), https://spc.byui.edu/idurl/1/1710.

only a dream and to make sure I began to move my legs, my arms and fingers, I grabbed my hair, pulled my ears and began to walk around the room, and everything functioned like it did in mortality.

"I thought, this must be death feared by all men, it was a feeling of ecstasy I felt so light like a newborn man all my limbs worked with ease almost to perfection. I was really dead, like after I drowned under that waterfall in the black forest… Now I understood that it is the spirit that gives the power to the mortal body of flesh, blood and bones to function and keep alive .... So this is what is called death, but I was more full of life than I was heretofore in my mortal life, why should we fear death, I was freed from all suffering, death was a welcome visitor, to get my spirit out of that sick body lying on the bed which was only a torture chamber for me and I had no more use for it and I wanted to get away from it."[245]

v) Hugh Nibley – "I didn't meet anything or anybody else, but I looked around. and not only was in all possession of my faculties, but they were tremendous. I was light as a feather and ready to go, you see.[246]

Tooley - He felt exhilaration as Earthly impurities were stripped away. [247]

vi) Freeman noticed that her sick body was well and fit in the Spirit World "we went up several flights of stairs, which had occasional landings in between them. I climbed the stairs with ease. I was pleased to discover that my spirit body was slender and energetic."[248]

vii) R. Jensen upholds the traditional LDS view of spirit as matter: "we must clearly understand, as Christ instructed Joseph Smith: "There is no such thing as immaterial matter. All

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[245] Herman Stulz.
[246] Hugh Nibley.
[247] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 951.
[248] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 48.

spirit is matter, but it is more fine or pure, and can only be discerned by purer eyes,'! and "Intelligence was not created or made, neither indeed can be."[249]

viii) Pedersen "As I looked at myself, not my body self but my spirit self I noticed that my hands looked like my hands and my feet looked like my feet. I was wearing clothing"[250]

ix) Wren Felt the power of prayers for him PHYSICALLY. Literally felt these prayers. Not just in his mind, but in his body. He does not know how to put this into words - Ineffability experienced. He felt them (the prayers) going through his body.[251]

(11) VIBRATION AND ENERGY

i) Tooley - All matter exists at certain vibrational frequencies. "All matter exists at certain vibrational frequencies. Spiritual or heavenly things vibrate at a higher frequency than do Earthly things." This explains why heavenly things are invisible to us. Evil vibrates at a lower frequency.[252]

ii) Olsen "I felt a familiar touch. I opened my eyes. Tamara was right next to me. She was real too. I could feel her. She was alive. I could feel her familiar vibration even more powerfully than her physical presence."[253]

iii) Freeman when discussing why some spirits are Earthbound says: "All energy has a vibrational level, and some things vibrate faster than others, sort of like varying wavelengths of different colors of light. If you're thinking more of Earthly things than heavenly things, it keeps your vibrations lower and you're not on a heavenly plane."[254]

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[249] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 54. And - D&C 93:29-30 The Doctrine and Covenants.
[250] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 78.
[251] Wren, *Heavenly Being: A Witness,* 46.
[252] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1406,1425.
[253] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 32.
[254] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 135.

iv) Call "My own vibration was changing. There was a big change in frequency."[255]

(12) SPACE TIME AND SPEED OF TRAVEL

Nelson 1989 118 "I was also aware of pure knowledge"

i) Harriet Salvina Beal (Millet) 1852 said she was able to move by simply floating through the air.

ii) Harriet Ovard Lee 1860 "some power seemed to pick me up off my feet and I crossed to the other side of the river… We entered the building on another side. The distance there seemed very long, but we glided along with perfect ease and without touching the ground with our feet."[256]

iii) William Wallace Raymond 1881 reports spirits do not ride horses however they move quite natural from place to place."[257]

iv) Earl Stowell "The ceiling seemed to melt away directly above us and we went out into the sky. . .. Our speed of travel increased until it seemed we caught up with rays or beams of light and passed them as if they were standing still."[258]

v) Thos. S. Thomas said, 'time is figured on a different basis than in Earthly life.' 59[259]

vi) Archie J. Graham reported; "I felt differently than I had ever felt before. My body was light in weight. I could move about with the least exertion as though in thought .... I felt as though I could fly, I was so light."[260]

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[255] Call, YouTube.
[256] Harriet Ovard Lee.
[257] William Wallace Raymond.
[258] Earl Stowell.
[259] Thomas, *Glimpse of Heaven,* 59.
[260] Archie J. Graham.

vii) Tooley [261] Views Earth - a parting view of distant Earth looked back at the Earth AND whilst having a tour of the Spirit World he describes "flying through the air, levitating. They fly in the air over trees. AND Levitation a power of spirit intelligence flying AND 'We only had to think of where we wanted to go and we were there. Thought was faster than light."

Tooley speed "I viewed everything at a high speed yet every scene was acted out at a normal pace."[262]

viii) Durham 'In that higher realm I knew that I could go anywhere at the speed of thinking it.'[263]

ix) Wallace said that "Time did not exist."[264]

Wallace "Grandma took my hand, and we traveled quickly over the landscape. I looked down at the ground flying under us. We streaked like a beam of light across this immense spiritual world then moved upward into space, traveling even faster." [265]

x) Frank Marion Purvis was struck by lightning on a golf course with his friend Scott Drummond. He said, "Time had no concept to me."[266]

xi) Drummond did not experience a tunnel but went straight to a grassy place. "Time passed without me knowing how much or little had gone by. …It was almost like the twinkling of an eye. Suddenly, I was standing in an open field of waist-high grass… Time also seemed to slow."[267]

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[261] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 970.
[262] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 970, 1151, 1294,2075,1406.
[263] Durham , *Stand All Amazed,* 98.
[264] Durham , *Stand All Amazed,* 108.
[265] Wallace, *The Burning Within,* 106.
[266] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me About Living*, 1.
[267] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me,* Ch. 5.

xii) Tom Gibson “It seems as if all I had to do was think of where I wanted to be, and I could go there at any speed I wished.” When Tom Gibson's wife asked him how long he spent telling people in the Spirit World about current conditions on Earth, Tom replied, "I don't know. Time doesn't seem to work the same as here."[268]

xiii) Freeman “the measurement of time in heaven is completely different than time on Earth,”[269]

xiv) R. Jensen “Time seems to have no meaning in the Spirit World [he explains that he watched countless years there in a short time Earth time here millions of years there was seen in 12 minutes here]”[270] R. Jensen also mentioned instantaneous spiritual travel.[271]

xv) Rowe “time in the Spirit World is different”[272]

xvi) Freeman saw old Salt Lake City and Old Nauvoo in their spiritual forms in the Spirit World**: “**Some saints who loved the old city of Nauvoo chose to live in the spiritual Nauvoo in heaven. Since that was the happiest place that Joseph and Emma Smith had lived on Earth, that's where they make their heavenly home, too. As we entered the city, I caught the delightful aroma of freshly baked bread. We passed picket fences skirted with lovely old-fashioned flowers popular 160 years ago, such as velvet roses, cheerful hollyhocks, and bright daisies, dressed in glorious colors and blessed with perfect proportions.’ Joseph Smith came out of his house to welcome us; Emma invited us to eat with them.”**[273]**

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[268] Tom Gibson.
[269] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 135.
[270] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 39.
[271] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 40.
[272] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 13.
[273] Freeman, *Led by the Hand* 93, 95.

xvii) R. Jensen "The passing of time in the Spirit World, as compared to Earth time, is like going to work in the morning as a child and returning from work as an aged ninety-year-old. Time is just not as important there."[274]

xviii) Call "In this place time is not in order. Time and space are different here. Everything is all at once…. I felt at that time that I understood EVERYTHING. That I felt the full truth of Laws and Order in the Universe. One thing that I held onto was the beautiful MATH of the Universe. I remember coming to understand that there was a supreme and perfect kind of MATH that was in and of ALL things that existed."[275]

xix) Pedersen "I learned by personal experience how a spirit moves along the ground, through the air or under the sea."[276] "Time appeared to move very slowly."[277]

(13) RECEIVING KNOWLEDGE / REALIZING ONENESS/OMNISCIENCE. WEB OF CONNECTION

i) Thos. S. Thomas "Your soul is endowed with wisdom and knowledge and filled with everlasting love." [278]

ii) Hugh Nibley Above all I was interested in problems. I'd missed out a lot of math and stuff like that. Now in five minutes I would be able make up for that."[279]

iii) Ricks -access to perfect knowledge viii Everything I was witnessing was somehow connected; it was as if it was One and I was a part of that Oneness. It was as if pure intelligence continuously flowed to my mind, and I comprehended many things in an instant. Whatever I

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[274] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 18.
[275] Call, YouTube.
[276] Pedersen *Near Death and the Afterlife* 12.
[277] Pedersen *Near Death and the Afterlife* 78.
[278] Thomas, *Glimpse of the Future,* 59.
[279] Hugh Nibley.

focused on, I could learn *and* experience everything about it. I could only remember having felt an incredible increase of knowledge.[280]

iv) Eadie learned so much. 'Love is supreme'[281]

v) Durham '*THE PURPOSE OF LIFE* I knew that every single individual who has ever lived had been "in training" from the eternities, learning how to become like God. That, I was· given to understand, means learning how to love unconditionally… learning to love, just as it has been through the eternities, is accomplished through joyfully giving service to others.'[282]

vi) Wallace "Floodgates of knowledge opened, and truth poured into me." [283]

vii) Fenimore As my understanding was awakened, the light that nourished me made all things clear. As I was soaking in the magnificent light, I was being immersed in pure knowledge, pure love-all that is good. And in the immersion many truths were revealed to me.

I understood that everything that enters our minds influences us and can alter the balance of light and darkness within us. 123 Many times we don't see the positive impact that our prayers have on the lives of those we pray for, though every prayer uttered is heard by God." [284]

viii) Olsen "There were a million questions racing through my head, but as soon as I thought of a question, the answer was immediately there. There was an ancient awareness, as if I had always been in this place."[285] "Now, everyone I saw was truly my brother or sister. In fact, it went even deeper than that They were, in a strange sense, me! We were all connected pieces in a

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[280] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 22,23.
[281] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light,* 59.
[282] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 38.
[283] Wallace, *The Burning Within*, 106.
[284] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,* 125.
[285] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 31.

huge puzzle of oneness."[286] During his VTE dream, Olsen received knowledge: "I knew I had come to this Earth for only one reason, which was to learn, and that everything that had ever happened to me had been a loving step in that process of my progression. Every person, every circumstance, and every incident was custom created for me. It was as if the entire universe existed for my higher good and development. I felt so loved, so cherished, and so honored. I realized that not only was I being embraced by deity, but also that I myself was divine, and that we all are. I knew that there are no accidents in this life. That everything happens for a reason. Yet we always get to choose how we will experience what happens to us here. I could exercise my will in everything, even in how I felt about the wreck and the death of my family members."[287]

ix) Call asks a question similar to one Joseph Smith asked. She asked her guide **'**What's the true religion? ' And I could feel his mind, how he understood me. And from his place it was as if a little kid came up and said 'Which kind of cheese is the moon made of? Jack, Cheddar, or Swiss?' He was really sweet about it. He didn't even really answer me… he just smiled, and I remember his head sightly bowing and this love emanating from him. To experience myself from his view, it blew everything — my whole foundation, everything I had come from" … Later she commented "I'd also wondered at religion while I was there, and I quickly received the sense that this wasn't important. That one's religion, no matter which they joined or didn't join on Earth, was always what was written in their own heart."[288]

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[286] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 37.
[287] Olsen. *I Knew Their Hearts,* 87.
[288] Call, YouTube.

x) Rowe is shown the past and future. “I was shown the War in Heaven, as well as various scenes that have played out on Earth throughout the history of mankind.” [289]

xi) Wayman also experienced this oneness and monism. He saw a “photo reel appeared in the sky. I saw faces of different people and realized that they were photos of every living person on Earth. Vividness … each one of the photos flipped over and I saw photos of me.[290] Later the divine explained to him that He explained the photos. “Al people on Earth are personas of you.” [291]

Gibson (*Echoes from Eternity*) p. 218 “I had…a feeling of total knowledge without asking.”

Top (*Beyond Death's Door*) p.132 “I can describe the experience as only ecstasy of a contemporal state in which present past, and future are one.

(14) TELEPATHIC COMMUNICATION TELEPATHY

i) Peter E. Johnson 1898 While I did not ask the question, they read it in my mind and immediately said, “You wish to know whether the prophet has his body or not?”

“This remark brought to my mind a question which has been much discussed here, as to whether or not the Prophet Joseph Smith is now a resurrected being. While I did not ask the question, they read it in my mind, and immediately said: 'You wish to know whether the prophet has his body or not?' "I replied: 'Yes, I would like to know.' I was told that the Prophet Joseph

[289] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 13.
[290] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love,* 353.
[291] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love,* 356.

Smith has his body, as also his brother Hyrum, and that as soon as I could do more with my body than I could do without it, my body would be resurrected."[292]

ii) Mary Hyde Woolf 1914 When Mary went to the Spirit World, she discovered that her guide could read her thoughts." She felt she could never depart from them so great was her happiness. "The guide read her thoughts and said, 'You must return for a brief season.'"[293]

iii) Ricks met Jesus, His voice was gentle, yet like the rushing of mighty waters, and when He spoke, He communicated telepathically. I do not recall seeing His lips move as He spoke. Perfect love-pure and Unconditional emanated from His personage. I felt complete acceptance. The power of His love encompassed everything, filling my heart with indescribable peace and joy. **[294]**

iv) Tooley "I realized that I hadn't seen his mouth move when he talked to me. I was hearing him inside my head." Larry tells him it is telepathy[295] AND Project and protect thoughts through telepathy there is some mind privacy not to share.[296] **Tooley**- telepathy is the purest form of communication – without misunderstandings feel the emotions not just the words of the 'speaker'[297]

v) Eadie "My questions were answered even before I fully asked them" (by Jesus) "Feelings and thoughts were communicated from spirit to spirit, from intelligence to intelligence." She calls it telepathy.[298]

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[292] "Mission Unfinished. Visit into the spirit world, Peter E. Johnson (From Relief Society. Magazine, Aug. 1920)," January 2, 2022, accessed November 13, 2024, https://ldsfreedomforum.com/viewtopic.php?p=1222526&sid=c49a34cbe310d6fa4d448da8d933ef6e#p1222526.

[293] Mary Hyde Woolf.

[294] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's*, 24.

[295] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1006.

[296] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1282.

[297] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1294.

[298] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light*, 32.

vi) Durham had telepathic communication with Jesus.[299]

vii) Drummond "I knew the person was male because I could hear his voice. I don't know who he was, but I'll recognize that voice if I ever hear it again. His voice was calming and comforting, but it surprised me to find I couldn't hear it audibly. The frenzied sounds of the operating room I could hear with my ears, but this *guide's* voice came to my mind. Interestingly enough, I found I could answer and converse with him in the same way, and I somehow knew he was there to help me."[300]

viii) Wallace met her grandmother "I realized her voice sounded in my mind and not in my ears." She added "She had communicated it with lightning speed, faster than computers can talk. It was instant and total knowing. I found that Grandmother and I could think on several levels at once and communicate them all simultaneously."[301]

ix) Tom Gibson 1992 "we could communicate with each other without speaking."

x) Olsen "I knew each person I saw perfectly. I knew their joys and their sorrows. I knew their love, their hate, their pain, and their secrets. I knew everything about them, every detail, every motivation, and every outcome. I knew every emotion they were feeling, and I knew intuitively why they were feeling it. In an instant, with no contemplation, I knew them as well as I knew myself I knew their hearts."[302] He could mind read and feel the emotions of people in the hospital as he floats around in spiritual form out of body. "I left that scene and moved freely down the hallways and into other rooms. I encountered many more people. I felt spontaneous, intense love for each and every one of them. I felt their true essence and marveled at the

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[299] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 50.
[300] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me About Living*, Ch. 4.
[301] Wallace, *The Burning Within,* 99.
[302] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 35-36.

connection I had to each of them, even though I had never met them before. what if I could feel the unconditional love I was now experiencing for every soul?"[303]

xi) Fenimore 1991 Telepathy – "I was coming to see that feeling – what some call intuition or the sixth sense – was the preferred method of transferring information here, where unvoiced ideas are audible." 93 "I had an inkling that I was remembering a long forgotten natural familiar skill that had been supplanted or subverted by words" [304]

xii) Rives Referring to Joseph Smith she says: "He continued to smile at me as he communicated

loving thoughts."[305] Also when she met Jesus, he spoke to her telepathically using His thoughts.[306]

xiii) Freeman "Communication in heaven is different. We spoke mind to mind, using just our thoughts. Since understanding is perfect, there is no confusion as to what someone means. The feeling pours out along with the words, so there is no misunderstanding whatsoever. This is perfect communication, and the best part of all is that only love is spoken here."[307]

xiv) Mendenhall enjoyed telepathic communication with Jesus after her recovery.[308]

xv) Lance Richardson – ['With a hug in the Spirit World you know everything about the other person telepathically perfect communication.'[309] Instead of shaking hands, spirits hug. When they do this, feelings and a synopsis of one's life is transferred to each other.]

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[303] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 36-37.
[304] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,* 93.
[305] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 96.
[306] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 129.
[307] Freeman *Led by the Hand,* 53.
[308] Mendenhall, *In His Arms*, 60.
[309] Richardson, *The Message*, 76.

xvi) Richardson – "I heard my grandfather's voice in my mind saying to me 'we do not need to speak with our mouths.' "I had heard his words with my spirit and in my mind…I saw a picture of what he was telling me. I felt the emotions he desired to communicate…I understood on a higher level."[310] "He was told he had communicated telepathically in his pre-Earth life, and that he had also forgotten other talents and capabilities.[311]

xvii) Call People can communicate mind to mind without talking and hearing. (telepathy) She says that she noticed a man who she felt was a mentor-teacher and she asked him why she was there. Call also communicated telepathically with unknown spirits she met in the Spirit World.[312]

xviii) Rowe "It quickly became apparent to me that every living thing, the grass, the flowers, the trees, the animals-all that I saw-were able to communicate with me and with each other telepathically." AND "John sensed my thoughts. We were essentially communicating through thought, so it was as though he was able to read my mind and I was able to understand his. Each time I would have the thought that I did not want to leave, John would redirect my attention to some of our previous conversation and would then continue sharing more with me about God's Plan of Happiness."[313]

xix) R. Jensen witnessed unlimited communication." "In the spirit to spirit communicating in the Spirit World, messages come into the heart and from the heart to the mind. When I spoke, I could select who heard me and I could hear only those who wanted me to hear them."[314]

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[310] Richardson, *The Message*, 55.
[311] Richardson , *The Message*, 55.
[312] Call, YouTube.
[313] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 11,13.
[314] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 40,41.

xx) Pedersen "Telepathy between me and the spirits that visited me was completely within my control. I could be as transparent or as closed off as I chose to be with them."[315] " Telepathy is the best way to describe our means of communication. When they appeared to me, I was able to choose to give them access to my thoughts or keep them to myself. They had the same ability."[316]

xxi) Wayman "A Wordless conversation communicated through my entire being, the meaning seeping into my soul." He said language cannot communicate the essence of the being he understood as God[317]

(15) KNOWING THE THOUGHTS AND FEELINGS OF OTHER BEINGS AND FORMS OF LIFE. MIND READING

i) Russell Ricks "When I would focus on a particular object, such as a flower, I would comprehend and experience everything about it-from how it is created and by what power it was made to everything and everyone who had smelt, touched, or appreciated its beauty. I could feel the joy the flower had in the measure of its creation when it pleased all those who appreciated its beauty." [318]

C MEETINGS

THE DIVINE

(16) The Light of God, Heavenly Father.

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[315] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 12.
[316] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 59.
[317] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love,* 254.
[318] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 22.

i) James G. Marsh 1838 “he had a remarkable vision, in which he talked with the Father and many of the ancient prophets face to face, and he beheld the Son of God coming in his glory.

"He said that the Lord showed him his own name written in the book of life in the mansions of celestial glory, and he saw his own mansion there.”[319] (Bateman 190)

ii) Harriet Ovard Lee 1860 "I looked through the narrow opening of the door and I could see a place of surpassing grandeur, having the appearance of pure gold. At the far end there seemed to be a big throne or altar of gold. There seemed to be a silvery light in this place. Tongue cannot tell nor pen describe the grandeur and dazzling magnificence of this place. "He said, 'This is the Celestial Kingdom of our God.”[320]

iii) Archie J. Graham 1918 experiences his guide changing into “the Lord”. At that moment, the guide underwent a change. "A shining glory radiated from his countenance," Archie said. "His clothing was already white, but now the glory of the Lord radiated from him . . . he looked through me and saw the innermost thoughts of my heart ... he said with a most thrilling, vibrating voice, yet gentle and kind, 'The Lord, your Master, loves you for your integrity. Have faith and trust in the Lord, and He will bless you and strengthen your back for every burden if you will trust Him .... You have only 14 years to make your preparations, for after your forty fifth anniversary, the Lord wants your heart, your time and your talents to be devoted to a special charge ....”[321]

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[319] Obituary," *Elders' Journal* (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints). July 1838. https://www.josephsmithpapers.org/paper-summary/elders-journal-july-1838/16.

[320] Harriet Ovard Lee.

[321] Archie J. Graham.

iv) Before 1962 A stake president told Mary Ann McAllister of his VTE which happened when he was hit by a car, in a period when he became inactive after being widowed after his wife committed suicide. “He said he’s been taken into the presence of God. The light was so brilliant it would have blinded mortal eyes. He spoke personally with Jesus Christ as one man does to another. Christ told him that all had been taken into account and considered. Some day he and his wife would be reunited. Jesus said she sits at the right side of me. He talked to him of the church and revealed many things. It had been a great puzzlement to him. Then he told him to return to Earth and repent. He awoke in hospital, recovered, went to the Temple and was married to (sealed) his (deceased) wife.” The church had previously not agreed to do the sealing because of her suicide, but after he told the authorities of his VTE they allowed it. This story contradicts most Christian teachings on the judgement awaiting suicides.[322]

v) Tooley had a glimpse of the glory of God. “I looked as far down the street as I could. I could see a brilliant golden white light, almost like the sun.” I felt a great love coming from the light. The most beautiful thing I have ever seen. “I could feel and all-encompassing love as the golden rays enveloped me.” 1043 Larry told him the light is the Glory of God.[323]

vi) Wayman I knew I stood before the throne of God.” God said to him “what form must I take for you to know who I am” “I recalled that God as a single personage does not exist. Rather God simply is. The essence echoes through everything in existence. Every blade of grass and grain of sand. Our origin breathes life into our bodies from the same essence. One essence, one consciousness.” “He offered to take the form of a man for me to know him, but I understood that while God can appear as a man to help our mortal minds comprehend him, the same essence

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[322] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Recounted by Mary Ann McAllister, 1962.

[323] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1024, 1043.

in this endless heart and the bright white wall of intelligence surrounding me. It didn't matter the form.[324] During his 2016 experience he encountered the divine feminine. In his second encounter he felt that God was male however He felt that God had both a male and female essence. 356 The divine could appear in many shapes 'This pure light stood next to me and expanded outward in all directions, and we began to float together into the vastness of existence.'.[325]

(17) MEETING JESUS

vii) Lovisa Mack Tuttle [326] reported "I saw the savior as through a Veil…and he told me I must return again to warn the people to prepare for death…and be watchful as well as prayerful."[327]

viii) Heber Q. Hale My eyes beheld my Lord and Saviour." "It is true," said President Smith. Oh, how my soul filled with rapture--unspeakable joy filled my heart.[328]

ix) 1896 Jennie Schnackenberg "The angel went away, and I heard the voice of Jesus "It is my will that you live, for it is not finished yet." She replied to Jesus that she wanted to stay. She then had a vision of the crucifixion. The voice said, "As Christ paid the price, so must you."[329]

x) Archie J. Graham 1918 saw the Prophet Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Brigham Young, Lorenzo Snow.[330]

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[324] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love,* 321, 354, 356.

[325] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love,* 356.

[326] Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, Lucy Mack Smith* (Salt Lake City: Improvement Rea Salt Lake City Utah 1902), 20, https://rsc.byu.edu/life-beyond-grave/near-death-experience. https://archive.org/details/HistoryOfTheProphetJosephSmithByHisMotherLucyMackSmith

[327] Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, Lucy Mack Smith* (Salt Lake City: Stevens & Wallis, 1945), 12–15.

[328] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho. Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920),https://spc.byui.edu/idurl/1/1710.

[329] Schnackenberg, Jennie 1896-. *Jennie Schnakenberg Letter, Sioux City Iowa to Bureau of Information.* Salt Lake City. Manuscript on Microfilm call # MS 12663. (100005015776) Church History Library.

[330] Archie J. Graham.

xi) Heber Q. Hale 1920 My eyes beheld my Lord and Saviour." "It is true," said President Smith. Oh, how my soul filled with rapture--unspeakable joy filled my heart.[331]

xii) Tom Gibson 1992 - "The world was different from this one. I'm not sure how I got there . . . I just followed Daniel. It seems as if all I had to do was think of where I wanted to be, and I could go there at any speed I wished. . . We continued walking for a while and I noticed someone on the path ahead of us. . . As we got closer to the individual on the path, I could see and feel that he was a magnificent person, and it was . . . I felt overwhelmed as I looked at him. He was bathed in light. Daniel asked if I knew who that was, and I answered, yes; it was Jesus Christ.

"When we got close to the Savior, I felt a tremendous love emanating from him. It's hard to describe, but you could feel it all around him, and I felt a similar enormous love for him. I fell at his feet—not because I thought about it, but because I couldn't stand"[332]

xiii) Ricks Jesus gives him spiritual lessons Jesus tells him he loves him [333] His radiance was brightest nearest His personage. His thick hair white and shoulder-length-was neatly groomed; He wore a full, white, neatly trimmed beard. His most striking and curious feature to me was His eyes, which seemed to appear as if they were on fire and yet they were not. I perceived clearly that this personage was my Savior, Jesus Christ, as witnessed by His wounds, which pierced His hands, wrists, and feet.[334]He looked into my eyes with great understanding, love, and compassion. He seemed to be able to look deep into my heart and soul. I felt no fear when He pierced my soul only more love and

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[331] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho. Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).

[332] Sullivan, *Gaze Into Heaven; Near-Death Experiences,* 89-90, 145.

[333] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* viii.

[334] D&C 93:1; 110:3.

perfect acceptance[335]

xiv) Eadie – She learned that "Jesus was a separate being from God, with his own divine purpose" In her view God and Jesus are separate beings and both men. God is not just a universal power but a 'Man' Jesus act as a guide and introduces her to other women who were her friends before she came to Earth. "I saw that the light immediately around him was golden...the golden halo burst out from around him and spread out into a brilliant whiteness…I felt his light blending into mine…and I felt my light being drawn into his..." …"as our lights merged, I felt as if I had stepped into his countenance." "It was the most unconditional love I have ever felt…I'm home." [336]

xv) Durham had an experience of oneness or divine union. 'There are no words to adequately describe this, but somehow, I realized that I had actually become a part of Christ's light. With incredible tenderness He made me part of His eternal presence, His eternal peace, and I felt a perfect joy such as I've never known, either before or since.' [337]

xvi) Menet - A bright light entered the city, blinding beyond our sun. The light came from a Jesus walking through the streets. Love emanates from him. [338]

xvii) Rives 1997 "I now stood facing the Savior. What a glorious sight my eyes beheld! His eyes radiated an incredible blue that blended with a brilliant white light that emanated nearly four feet out from His person. This light filled me with a peace and heavenly warmth. The glory of His personage was so bright I could barely make out his features, yet I was able to see enough to know that He was the most powerful and beautiful man I had ever seen.

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[335] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 24.
[336] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light,* 41,47, 61,72.
[337] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 32.
[338] Menet, *There Is No Death,* 48.

Unconditional love, unwavering devotion, profound knowledge and peaceful joy radiated in his countenance. What delighted me most was His sense of humor because I had always thought Christ was very serious in nature. I stood enraptured at His presence. As I stood there holding his hand, gazing upon Him, I realized that He was tall, taller than I had imagined. He had shoulder length hair and a beard. He was clothed in a white robe, with long sleeves, tied about His waist. Without moving His lips, He spoke to me, using His thoughts, and with power and sweet conviction said, "Kim, look to the light and live!" With great compassion He took both of my hands in front of Him and gazed into my eyes for what seemed like an eternity. If I would extend my hand forward, into His light, I could touch an emotional grid. In the light, I would be allowed to feel any perfected emotion and feeling that I desired. I did not actually see a grid, just His wonderful embracing light. As I extended my hand forward, amazing, and vivid feelings began to flow up my arms and into my being. I felt the pure perfected emotion of truth, honesty, obedience, peace, love, and forgiveness flow up my arm, into my chest and throughout my entire spiritual body. I felt exhilarated at experiencing each virtue in its highest form. Christ continued to smile at me then proceeded to show me a vision of my cancer."[339]

xviii) Fenimore Most of her VTE consists of meeting God the Father and Jesus and learning the error of her ways when she strayed from the church and tried to end her life. She describes the body form and light of God She sees others around God the Father. He speaks to her. Then she meets Jesus and realizes her was with her during the life review. Her wrong was to doubt them and the authenticity of the scriptures. God the Father and Jesus teach her about

[339] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 128-131.

the Laws of Spirit. She saw how her suicide would affect her kids.[340] Place of darkness is spiritual time-out. Sorrowful at the wasted opportunities and lives she had affected.[341]

Fenimore - She describes the Father - Now within the brilliance I could see the form of a man draped in billowing robes of breathtaking whiteness. Pearlescent, magnificent hair flowed back onto His shoulders from a noble, rounded widow's peak. He was a being of light, not just

radiating light or illuminated from within, but He almost seemed to be made of the light. It was a light that had substance and dimension, the most beautiful, glorious substance that I have ever beheld. 100 101 Probably because of the brilliance of the light, which was white, God looked to me like an old man without wrinkles and with a young, strong body. His shoulders were broad, and His chest was full. His arms were strong, and the muscles well defined. His chiseled facial structure was strong and perfect, softened by a great white beard. But more striking to me than His physical features was the light that emanated from them. Next, she met Jesus.

This light was unmistakably of the same brilliance as the glorious light that emanated from the Father, but my spiritual eyes were incapable of fully beholding it. The rays of light penetrated me with incredible force, with the power of an all-consuming love. This love was as pure and potent as the Father's, but it had an entirely new dimension of pure compassion, of complete and perfect empathy. I felt that He not only understood my life and my pains exactly, as if He had actually lived my life, but that He knew everything about how to guide me through it; how my different choices could produce either more bitterness or new growth. 103 His greatest desire was to help me. He spoke to me through the Veil of darkness, " Don't you

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[340] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,* 104.
[341] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,* 116.

understand? I have done this for you." As I was flooded with His love and with the actual pain that He bore for me, my spiritual eyes were opened. In that moment I began to see just exactly what it was that the Savior had done, how He had sacrificed for me. I knew where I had gone wrong. I had doubted His existence. I had questioned the authenticity of the Scriptures.[342]

As God the Father and Jesus were teaching me, their words picked up speed and power and then merged so that they were saying the exact same things in the very same moment. They shared one voice, one mind, and one purpose, and I was deluged with pure knowledge. I learned that just as there are laws of nature, of physics and probability, there are laws of spirit. One of these spiritual laws is that a price of suffering must be paid for every act of harm.[343]

Freeman "Someone grabbed me, and I stopped as suddenly as if I'd hit a glass wall. I whirled around and stared at a large hand that gripped my upper arm, a strong, perfect hand marred by a cruel puncture wound in the very center. My eyes flew up to stare into a familiar face. The blue eyes lit up with love and delight when my glance met his. The smooth cheeks above his chestnut beard lifted into a warm smile. It was Jesus Christ who had hold of me, and with a voice full of love he said, "Come with *me:'* 'Why would he come to escort insignificant me?' "I have to go back;' I said as I tried to pull away from Christ's grasp.' My efforts to escape were as fierce as a grizzly bear breaking free to protect her cub… It was foolish to think that I could get away from the Lord,"[344]

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[342] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,*104-106.
[343] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,* 109.
[344] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 42-44.

xix) Mendenhall "She awoke from sleep in her bedroom to see the Lord "I really knew it was him from the amazing love I could feel from him." She hugged him." [345]He took her to meet the Father: Denise was taken by the Lord to meet our Father in heaven and was introduced to the Holy Prophets."[346]

xx) R. Jensen "noticed a white-clad man standing behind my parents. I recognized him as the same person who had stood quietly at the end of my bed during my first Spirit World visit. The Holy Ghost inform me as to who he was-my eldest brother, the Firstborn in the Spirit World, the Only Begotten of the Father - yes, my personal Savior. The exquisite and purely penetrating love of this embrace was indescribable."[347]

R. Jensen "From my experience, I can tell you that the voice of Christ was sweet and gentle, yet it penetrated every particle of my being His smile is contagious and welcoming, His eyes sparkle, full of love. His laugh is engaging and surrounded me with love. The atmosphere and aura around Him were very calming and made me feel safe and secure. He was not at all judgmental or critical. His physical body is in the form of a man, just as it was when he walked the Earth with his apostles, although it is now glorified beyond description, for He is God. And although he is an exalted and glorified being, He is still personable, friendly, caring, cheerful, and approachable."[348]

xxi) Rowe "I have seen the Throne of God and the Savior of Mankind standing on the right hand of God." [349]

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[345] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 24.
[346] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 24.
[347] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 19,20.
[348] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* xiii, xiv.
[349] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 96.

xxii) Moe 2006 'I can see angels surrounding Jesus,' and she describes his loving eyes as being able to penetrate her soul. [350]

xxiii) Wren "he had a full complete understanding that God and Jesus, who he didn't see, were there …I felt their presence. I knew they were there."[351] He talks of catching a glimpse of eternity and being comforted by divine personages. He calls it "peace beyond anything you could imagine."[352]

(18) Holy Ghost, Holy Spirit (There is no Trinity, rather three separate Godhead figures)

i) Richardson - He felt the love and illuminating light of the Holy Spirit which taught him truth.[353]

ii) Wren – is a sportscaster from Salt Lake City, Utah - before he hit the ground, he heard a voice command him to shout out "Call 911!... He realized he was fully cognizant, and he heard the Holy Ghost tell him in his ear 'many, many dear souls are praying for you!"[354]

(19) HEAVENLY MOTHER

i) Rives found herself in the presence of a magnificent maternal woman. I was to understand that it was my Mother in Heaven. She was beautiful! Words cannot describe the sanctity and love that I felt in her presence. She was about my height, five foot six and had a

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[350] Moe, *Visions of Heaven,* 6.

[351] Wren, Heavenly Being. "Round Trip Death #202 - Joe's Near Death Experience," Round Trip Death, June 21, 2022, https://www.roundtripdeath.com/round-trip-death-202-joes-near-death-experience/.

[352] Deseret News Aug 31,2018. by Brad Rock. Brad Rock, "After Near-death Experience, Former Salt Lake Sportscaster Joe Wren Says Watching BYU Football Is Heavenly — but so Is Everything Else," *Deseret News*, December 22, 2023, https://www.deseret.com/2018/8/31/20652441/after-near-death-experience-former-salt-lake-sportscaster-joe-wren-says-watching-byu-football-is-hea.

[353] Richardson, *The Message,* 69.

[354] Wren, Joe David. *Heavenly Being: A Witness to Glorious Life After Death.* (MCP Books, 2018). A Round Trip Death Podcast by Eric Bennet on Spotify. Round Trip Death #202 - Joe's Near Death Experience. June 20, 2022, Quote from The Salt Lake Tribune. Feb.6,2018 by Scott D. Pierce.
"Scott D. Pierce: Fox 13 Sportscaster Joe Wren Almost Died on the Air," *The Salt Lake Tribune*, February 6, 2018, https://www.sltrib.com/sports/2018/02/06/fox-13-sportscaster-joe-wren-almost-died-on-the-air/.

petite frame. I immediately noted her smooth, satiny, silky, hands that were delicate and poised. They

were very youthful, yet emanated the aura of ages, ancient in wisdom, time, and experience. [355]

ii) Mendenhall visited Heavenly Mother.[356]

iii) Rowe She also sees our 'Mother in Heaven.' [357]

(20) MARY MOTHER OF JESUS

i) 1896 Jennie Schnackenberg "Later that year she was sick again in the womb. The voice came to her again. He also had a vision of Mary and the Infant Jesus, and then a very bright light."[358]

(21) MEETING PROPHETS

i) Harriet S. Beal 1852 "I was very pleasantly surprised to see the Prophet Joseph Smith walking up and down a very long room and he had his hands clasped behind him, his head bowed as though in thought. At long tables on either side of the room and down the center also, many men set writing as fast as they could and once in a while the Prophet Joseph Smith would stop and speak to one of the men. They would answer, then go right on writing as fast as before. Among these men were the Prophet's brother Hyrum, also other men that I had known well."[359]

ii) Harriet Ovard Lee 1860 Fell off a haystack needed surgical repair of her bowels twice. - and I looked and there I saw a beautiful crystal mountain, having the appearance of ice.

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[355] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 108-109.
[356] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 15.
[357] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow*, 96.
[358] Schnackenberg, Jennie 1896-. *Jennie Schnakenberg Letter, Sioux City Iowa to Bureau of Information.* Salt Lake City. Manuscript on Microfilm call # MS 12663 (100005015776) Church History Library.
[359] Peterson, Cora Anna Beal, 1880-1952 Biography of William Beal 7-10,https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/326cad1e-be72-4dd1-9b68-f025db909248/0/14.

It dazzled so that I could scarcely look upon it. "While I looked on it in admiration, the mountain gradually split in twain until there was quite a wide opening between its two parts, and out of 42 this opening came the Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum, followed by a great multitude walking two abreast. The faces of all except the Prophet and his brother, Hyrum, had the appearance of a light copper color. "I said to the guide, 'That is our Prophet Joseph Smith and his brother Hyrum, but who are these who follow?' "He answered, 'Those are the ten tribes of the house of Israel. Joseph and his brother have been preaching to them and they are gathering them home.'[360]

iii) William Wallace Raymond 1881 said, "I have been to the Spirit World and have seen many things, and many people that I knew, I saw Joseph and Hyrum Smith and Brigham Young and members of the twelve that are dead."[361]

iv) Mrs. Francis 'Fanny' Woodbury 1890 was deathly ill. "She … woke and called her children to her and told then she had been to visit their deceased father. He led me by the hand to a beautiful mansion. On going inside, we saw Brigham Young and other church leaders. President Young told her she had lived a good life and wanted to know what she desired. She said to return to Earth until her youngest child turned 18. He said her wish would be granted. Then her dead husband showed her the beautiful home he had prepared for her over there and he warned her she would suffer if she returned to Earth. She still chose to return to her children… On her youngest Rose's 18th birthday, she was taken violently ill. Elders administered to her. She

[360] Harriet Ovard Lee.
[361] William Wallace Raymond.

suffered for 8 weeks. Her family prayed that she might be relieved of her suffering. She died Nov 1904."[362]

v) Peter E. Johnson 1898 'the guide came to me with a message, that I was wanted by some of the apostles who had lived on the Earth in this dispensation. As soon as I came into their presence, I was asked if I desired to remain there.'[363]

vi) Archie J. Graham 1918 saw the Prophet Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Brigham Young, Lorenzo Snow.[364]

vii) Joseph F. Smith 1918 saw Adam and Eve and many of the holy prophets in the Spirit World including Abel, Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Issac, Jacob, Moses, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Elias, Malachi, Elijah, North American prophets, Joseph Smith, Hyrum Smith, Brigham Young, John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff and other choice spirits.[365]

viii) Tooley 1972 There he meets Peter James and John (when he meets the council to be sent back) He describes them physically.[366]

ix) Tom Gibson 1992 "Daniel then brought me to a building, and we met another person. Daniel introduced him as Peter, the Apostle. It seems surprising to me now that I saw both Jesus and Peter, but at the time it didn't seem unusual."[367]

x) Rives "I saw a classroom filled with light. At the front of the room stood Joseph Smith… Seeing me enter, he stopped his lecture and walked toward me with his big blue eyes

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[362] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. 'The Voice of the Dead.' Tale Returning from the Dead Dec 19678 Riverside CA. Collector Mark Molen, p. 5-8. Informant Clarence Woodbury 83 yrs. old. The story is about his mother Francis Goddard Woodbury, wife of Orin Nelson Woodbury. The Woodbury family had written down this family history.

[363] Peter E. Johnson.

[364] Archie J. Graham.

[365] D&C, 138 38-52.

[366] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1675. (Kindle)

[367] Tom Gibson.

and gregarious smile. With outstretched arms he took me to himself and gave me the best hug I had ever experienced. It felt as though every cell of my body had been touched with warmth, light, and love."[368]

xi) Freeman "I soon noticed someone hurrying toward us. The LDS prophet Joseph Smith was all but running along the path, his arm outstretched for a handshake and a beautiful grin spread across his face."[369] Next, she meets Brigham Young. "Right behind Joseph Smith was the prophet Brigham Young. He waited his turn to greet me with a look of patient tolerance as Joseph Smith pumped my arm up and down. Joseph Smith and Brigham Young both appeared to be about six feet tall, but that included Brigham Young with his top hat on. Their clothes were of the same style that they would have worn while living in their time period on Earth. Then, without any warning and to my great surprise, Joseph Smith took a running leap onto the

grass beside us and performed a perfect double back flip… Joseph Smith and Brigham Young had their families with them. I remember Emma Smith and Marianne Young dressed in clothes appropriate to their era on Earth."[370]

xii) Freeman "Jesus takes her to meet Adam and Eve, dressed in white, in a lush garden of Eden. She visits with Jesus, Adam and Eve."[371] Next, she meets the Prophet Joseph of Egypt sitting on an ornate throne in a marble palace.[372] Next she meets Nephi with a full Eurocentric description! "Nephi is around seven feet tall with well-sculpted muscles, blond hair, blue eyes, and is very handsome."[373]

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[368] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 96.
[369] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 59.
[370] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 60, 63.
[371] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 69.
[372] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 78.
[373] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 84.

xiii) Freeman "The next place I visited was Brigham Young's Beehive House. The Beehive House in the Spirit World is new and beautiful. In that room, I was privileged to meet the deceased prophets of this dispensation. Besides Brigham Young, there was John Taylor, Wilford Woodruff, Lorenzo Snow, Joseph F. Smith, Heber J. Grant, George Albert Smith, David 0. McKay, Joseph Fielding Smith, Harold B. Lee, Spencer W. Kimball, Ezra Taft Benson, and Howard W. Hunter."[374]

THE ANGELIC / ANGELIC ANCESTORS.

(22) ANGELS

A young man was met by an angel who escorted him into the afterlife and told him to wait for his sister. (Crowther 1967).

i) May Farnsworth 1888 Six months previous to the death of his daughter a personage in the form of a woman appeared to her and conversed with her for some time… The messenger that appeared the second time said to her 'May, you are coming very soon."[375]

ii) Jennie Schnakenberg 1896 "Jennie then saw an angel. "He was very beautiful, his feet did not touch the ground,"[376]

iii) 1896 - Jennie Schnackenberg had a VTE during childbirth. "She asked the Lord to spare her life for the sake of her young children. "I wandered into a very beautiful place…marveled at the beauty of the place… I saw a great gulf and on my side a donkey passed by. Then a very bright star came out of the clouds on the other side. An angel came out from

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[374] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 98, 99.

[375] Deseret News 1888-12-29 Miscellaneous Publisher Salt Lake City, Utah : Deseret News Pub. Co., Deseret Weekly 1888-12-29 | Page 28 | Miscellaneous | | Utah Digital Newspapers. "Deseret News 1888-12-29 Miscellaneous," n.d., https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/desnews9/id/13569, (accessed 11/13/2024).

[376] Jennie Schnakenberg.

under the star and said, 'hail woman.' He was very beautiful, and his feet did not touch the ground. I followed him until I reached the edge of the gulf."[377]

iv) Peter E. Johnson 1898 I beheld a personage who said, "You did not know that I was here." I replied, "No, but I see you are. Who are you?" "I am your guardian angel. I have been following you constantly while on Earth."[378]

v) Heber Q. Hale 1920 This was my first experience after going to sleep. I seemed to realize that I had passed through the change called death and I so referred to it in my conversation with the immortal beings with whom I came immediately into contact[379]

vi) Brian Son of Lloyd Gardner Glenn 1993 – "the child told his mother "Do you remember when I got stuck under the garage door, well it was so heavy and hurt real bad. I called to you but you didn't hear me. I started to cry…and then the birdies came. The birdies made a whooshing sound and flew into the garage and took care of me." When asked what the birdies looked like he said "they were so beautiful. They were dressed in white and some in green and white. They spoke and told me the baby would be alright. The baby lying on the garage floor."[380]

vii) Durham - She says they don't have wings[381] and she had her own guide who was a powerful angelic being.[382]

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[377] Schnackenberg, Jennie 1896-. *Jennie Schnakenberg Letter, Sioux City Iowa to Bureau of Information.* Salt Lake City. Manuscript on Microfilm call # MS 12663 (100005015776) Church History Library.

[378] Visit into the spirit world, Peter E. Johnson (From Relief Society. Magazine, Aug. 1920).

[379] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).

[380] Glenn, Lloyd Gardner. 'Free The Birdies'. Manuscript on Microfilm Call # MS 15490 (100000656891) Written by Lloyd Gardner Glenn 1994 for a High Council talk delivered in Lake Forest Ward Santa Margarita CA Stake. In 1993 - His 3-year-old son Brian had been crushed beneath the garage door and rushed to Mission Hospital. Miraculously he survived with no physical or neurological deficits. Church History Library.

[381] Durham, *I Stand All Amazed,* 50.

[382] Durham, *I Stand All Amazed,* 52.

viii) Drummond "One of the important things I learned from my NDE is that angels are real. "The guide who came when I died and took me to the field, I know was my guardian angel."[383]

ix) Rives" Angels! I had just been visited by angels! They were dressed in white with gold belts, with an emanating aura of peace and love. Some were blonde, some brunette. This surprised me as I had thought all angels had white hair. Heavenly music played in the background. She floated toward me through the air. her entire countenance seemed to shine"[384] Angel cures: After surgery she is visited by an angel doctor who cures the cancer that had spread to her other breast much to the surprise of her physician.[385]

Later **Rives** sees how angels help those in Earth both in her past and present. "I was, an eyewitness to this simple but intervening assistance from one who was beyond the Veil, unseen by normal mortal eyes. It was then I realized that angels give us assistance and righteous counsel, guiding us toward our talents and greater potential as well as in helping us to avoid certain misfortune and danger." She adds that dead children become angels "I also saw how the death of loved ones, in this case my twin sisters, does not mean loss forever, but can, in all actuality, mean the gaining of an incredible and divine guardian angel."[386]

x) Freeman "Family members and friends can act as guardian angels to help us return to God's kingdom. After we pass to the other side, our mission may be to help others on Earth return to our Heavenly Father. Guardian angels are never too busy to help when we need it. All we have to do is ask in righteousness and we can get help."[387]

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[383] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me,* Ch. 6.
[384] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 1.
[385] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 58,61.
[386] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 120.
[387] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 116.

xi) Pedersen "One of the angels had left…was about to be born as a human child on Earth. 'When I had visitors in my room the Angels were often invisible to me, but they always returned as the last visitor was leaving for the night. Sometimes they joined me during evening prayer with my wife. Each of them folded their arms and bowed their heads just like we do."[388] However he has an unorthodox belief about angels linked to spiritual warfare ideas, "Angels tell him they are guarding his weak body so that evil spirits cannot get inside it… Later that night I experienced a panic attack. I watched helplessly as a horde of spirits overpowered my Angels and began to pour into my body. They remained a part of my soul until I calmed down and prayed hard. Then with the help of my Guardian Angels I was able to expel the vile spirits from my body."[389]

xii) Moe claims they intervene to help us 'we may not be aware of angels praying for us or coming to us in times of danger or sadness.' [390]

FAMILY MEETINGS

(23) GREETED BY FRIENDS AND FAMILY.

i) Lorenzo Dow Young 1816 had a lucid visionary dream when aged 9: "almost instantly were in another world, of the magnitude of which I formed no conception. It was filled with innumerable hosts of beings as naturally human as those among whom I had lived. …some of them I recognized as acquaintances in the world I had just left."

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[388] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 63.
[389] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 63,66.
[390] Moe, *Visions of Heaven,* 34.

ii) Martha Jane Boice 1840 returned shortly and predicted which of her children would die soon.[391]

[Jedidiah Grant said, as recounted by **Heber C. Kimball** at his funeral in **1856**]: He saw the righteous gathered together in the Spirit World, and there were no wicked spirits among them. He saw his wife; she was the first person that came to him. He saw many that he knew but did not have conversation with any except his wife Caroline. She came to him, and he said that she looked beautiful and had their little child, that died on the Plains, in her arms, and said, "Mr. Grant, here is little Margaret; you know that the wolves ate her up, but it did not hurt her; here she is all right."[392]

iii) Marba Peck Hale's grandmother Mrs. Van Holden Peck 1878 "She saw many people she knew who were dead, both friends and family. They greeted and welcomed her. It was a happy reunion."[393]

iv) William Wallace Raymond 1881 "I also saw my parents, children and many of our neighbors. One sister from this place with whom I was personally acquainted."[394]

v) David P. Kimball 1881 VTE when ill after traveling. "I beheld hundreds, even thousands, of friends and relatives. I was then given the privilege of asking questions and did so."

The next night: "A glorious vision burst upon me. There were thousands of the Saints presented to me, many who had died at Nauvoo, in Winter Quarters, on the plains and in Utah. I

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[391] Martha Jane Boice.

[392] Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:135–36.

[393] Marba Peck Hale, 1928-, *Marba P. Hale Papers.* Manuscript. MS 21208 (1000010223535) Folder 6. My Grandmother Peck's experience of Dying. VTE in 1878. Written 1985 by Marba Peck Hale, grandmother Van Holden Peck. Church History Library.

[394] William Wallace Raymond.

saw Brother Pugmire and many others whom I did not know were dead. When my mother came to me it was so real and I was so overjoyed that I exclaimed aloud." David told his sister that he had also seen his father. "My father sat in a chair with his legs crossed and his hands clasped together, as we have often seen him."[395]

vi) Ella Jensen 1891 - the first person I recognized was my grandpa, H. P. Jensen. In a room "I met a great many of my relatives and friends… Uncle Hans Jensen with his wife Mary Ellen. Some inquired about their friends and relatives on the Earth.[396]

vii) Thos. S. Thomas 1894 He met a group of souls who inquired about friends on Earth. "The grand greeting you first receive is from your closest of kin…and all that are near and dear to you who passed. "[397]

viii) 1895 Grandmother of Annette Pack had painful appendicitis aged 19 and was near death - "The room seemed to be filled with heavenly beings, some of whom I recognized and knew to be relatives and friends who had previously passed away. Everything was beautiful and peaceful. I seemed to know I was in heaven and could have been very happy except for realizing the grief of my loved ones at home."[398]

ix) Peter E. Johnson 1898 "Just before my eldest sister died, she asked me to enter into this agreement: That if she died first, she was to watch over me, protect me from those who might seek my downfall, and that she would be the first to meet me after death. If I happen to

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[395] David P. Kimball.
[396] Ella Jensen.
[397] Thomas, *A Glimpse of the Future*, 60 – 62.
[398] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 11. p.1-2. Family Legend An Encounter with Death. Informant Margaret Pack Seely Tremonton UT 1981**.** Collected by Annette Pack Logan UT 1981 Margaret is her aunt who was born in the early 1900s. This aunt helped Annette compile the life history of her grandmother. They found this story written in her grandmother's own words in her journal. This and other stories were shared in a family reunion in Tremonton. This happened when her grandmother was 19 years old.

die first, she wished me to do the same for her. We made this agreement, and this was the reason that my sister was the first one of my relatives to meet me. [dead sister meets him by arrangement and prior agreement] "After she arrived, my mother and other sisters and friends came to see me, and we discussed various topics, as we would do here on meeting friends."[399]

Peter E. Johnson's 1898 angelic guide took him to meet his sister and then his mother. "After she arrived, my mother and other sisters and [3] friends came to see me, and we discussed various topics much as we would on Earth upon meeting old friends." [400]

x) Flora Ann Mayer c. 1900 She saw many people she knew who were dead, both friends and family. They greeted and welcomed her. It was a happy reunion. She said it was so beautiful and peaceful there she didn't want to leave. She was happier than she had ever been.[401]

xi) Bertha Deusnup Elder 1913 said her guide "escorted her into a large room where she was greeted by many of her departed friends." [402]

xii) Lorena Wilson 1915 who got sepsis after a broken needle entered her hand, saw "lying upon my bed at about midday, I noticed my room filling with soft bright light. "Immediately following the light, my father, who had been dead seven, years, came into my room. He was accompanied by my mother, who had been dead thirty years, and by my sister and her daughter-in-law who had both been dead two years ...."[403]

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[399] Peter E. Johnson.
[400] *Visit into the Spirit World,* Peter E. Johnson (From Relief Society. Magazine, Aug. 1920). Peter E. Johnson, Mission Unfinished.
[401] Flora Ann Mayer.
[402] Bertha Deusnup Elder.
[403] Lorena Wilson.

xiii) Iva Langford 1916 "I was then having sinking spells and while in one, it seemed that my spirit left my body, for I was shown my grandfather, brother, and sister, and a host of relatives and friends that had passed from this life, and the beautiful place they were in. I wanted to stay with them, but my grandfather told me that they had intended taking me with them, but the faith and prayers that had been exercised in my behalf had been so great my life

would be spared for a time."[404]

xiv) Henry Zollinger 1920 "at that moment my guardian angel, my mother who had died in January 1918 and my sister, Annie, who had died in infancy, were beside me." [405] Henry Zollinger met many people "My mother then introduced me to the heads of five generations of my father's people, … We then had the privilege of visiting my brothers-in-law who had died…. I saw a man who had been a Campbellite Minister down in Texas."[406]

xv) Heber Q. Hale 1920 "I met my beloved mother. She greeted me most affectionately and expressed her surprise at seeing me there and reminded me that my mission on Earth was not completed….[407] Later he says, "I was greeted by many friends and relatives, certain of whom sent words of greeting and counsel to their dear ones here,"[408]

xvi) Lerona Wilson 1915 - My father came first, then my mother, my sister and her son's wife… I caught the eye of my nephew's wife, whose death was the most recent [409]

xvii) Walter P. Monson 1923 "As I turned my head in the direction I intended to go, I saw my little daughter, Elna, who died in infancy, twenty-one years before. She was more

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[404] Iva Langford.
[405] Zollinger.
[406] Zollinger.
[407] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho. Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).
[408] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho. Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).
[409] Lerona Wilson.

mature than when she passed away, having the intelligence of an adult, and was most beautiful to my eyes, so full of life and so intelligent and sweet. "As she came towards me, she raised her right hand and said, 'Go back, papa, I want Richard first. Then grandma must come, and then mama is coming, before you."'[410]

xviii) Mary Hales 1925 I was standing at the top of that amphitheater looking at all those soldiers. "I recognized the man speaking to them. It was my brother, Howard, … who had been lost in action. He indicated that he recognized me too by smiling at me, but he continued his speech until he was finished. After he delivered his sermon, he walked up to see me. "'What are you doing here?' he asked. "'I don't know,' was my honest reply." She met her dead baby sister and then "To my amazement I recognized the teachers. They were women I had known who had died."[411]

xix) George Albert Smith (before 1940) "I became aware that he was a very large man, and I hurried my steps to reach him, because I recognized him as my grandfather .... I remember how happy I was to see him coming. I had been given his name and had always been proud of it. When Grandfather came within a few feet of me, he stopped."[412]

xx) Before 1970 Woman Sees Her Brother and Mother [President David 0. McKay, the ninth prophet of the Church, tells about the near-death experience of a woman who was in the last stages of a terminal illness.] "This woman had always been very close to her brother, William, and during her illness asked about him every day. Then, unknown to her, William died unexpectedly. Since she was so sick herself, no one wanted to cause her anguish. Everyone felt it would be better if she did not know. However, when she visited the Spirit World, she saw

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[410] Walter P. Monson.
[411] Mary Hales.
[412] George Albert Smith.

William and knew he had passed away." 'I have seen William and Mother together. How happy they seem. They wanted me to go with them, but I was not ready. How happy they will be.'

"She knew he was gone. Nobody had said a word to her, but a consciousness had come to her that her brother William was with her mother, who had been dead for many years. The sister, however, was not quite ready.'[413]

xxi) Tooley 1972 He meets his family "these are your relatives. They have all lived on the Earth before you. They've all gathered to meet you and to welcome you back."[414]

xxii) Eadie - She enjoys a greeting party – she meets many spirits, who hug and kiss her. They all know she has to go back though.[415]

xxiii) Durham met her family members [416]

xxiv) Daybell "I saw two male figures standing about ten feet above me. I'm certain one was Grandpa Keith." "I was complete out of my body, standing in front of them. He mentioned my children and described the roles they would play in the future. He also explained the tasks I needed to accomplish." When Chad agreed to fulfill his assignments his grandfather motioned his hand, "I was suddenly back in my body, which had washed closer to shore, I felt like I was wrapped in a soft protective heavenly cushion." His family rushed to pull him to his feet, and he was alright."[417]

xxv) Rives 1997 "Directing my gaze, I was astonished at what I saw. There, sitting in front of me

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[413] Sullivan, *Gaze Into Heaven,* 175.
[414] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1527.
[415] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light,* 23.
[416] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 20.
[417] Daybell *Living on the Edge* 109.

was Cindy… Cindy had accidentally been hit and killed by a truck as she was walking to school." She also saw her grandmother's son who had died as a young child.[418]

xxvi) Freeman met her grandparents.[419] She met other relatives, and literally touched their hands: "James' sister, Connie Sue, moved in to hug me. I recognized her at once, even though I'd only seen photographs, because she'd been dragged to death by a horse when she was only fifteen.' I gave Connie's hands an affectionate squeeze. 'It's good to see you.'"[420] She adds: "Most of the family who greeted me had come and gone before I was born, yet even if I hadn't seen their photographs, I knew they were my family."[421]

xxvii) Mendenhall sees relatives after her recovery. "Her dead grandfather also visits her and tells her stories."[422]

xxviii) Rowe 2004 "97 Family Connections I was shown specific people beyond the Veil that I do not know, but it was made clear to me that they are my ancestors. I also saw some of my ancestors-my grandparents, some of my great aunts and uncles, great grandparents, along with Jeff's grandparents and some of his ancestors. "They were family. They were friends. They loved me and they had been given responsibility over me." [423]

xxix) R. Jensen "My first wife, Carol, was the first person I saw. Standing a bit behind her to her left was my mother, Florence, who had died of a stroke ten months before my wife had passed away. Next to her was my father Andrew, who died from a massive heart attack on February 13, 1992. All three stood motionless with a majestic glow. I noted that Carol was

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[418] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 97,98.
[419] Freeman *Led by the Hand,* 52-53.
[420] Freeman *Led by the Hand,* 54.
[421] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 55.
[422] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 64.
[423] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow* 97, 8 .

wearing a red blouse or sweater, and a medium-red floral skirt that came down halfway from her knee to her ankle. My mother was wearing a dark-blue floral dress-this with white, light blue, red, and orange outlined flowers-that covered her ankles. My father wore a well-tailored suit, dark in color, with a white shirt and dark tie, very much the way our prophet and apostles dress today."[424]

R. Jensen says that our family in the Spirit World know what happens to us in our Earth lives.[425]

xxx) Moe who slipped and needed ankle surgery in 2006, had a vision of her father-in-law in the Spirit World, even though she had never met him or been given any information about him. These family members often know the fate of the person having the VTE Richard, your dad is terrific. He told me not to be afraid, that I would survive the surgery because it's not my time yet." (11) 'Family members who are already in heaven know when another relative is soon to cross the Veil, and they are excitedly waiting to help the person make the transition.'[426]

(24) SEEING DEAD RELATIVES AND FRIENDS - INCLUDING THOSE NOT KNOWN TO BE DEAD

i) Ella Jensen – "she saw a boy who she thought to be alive, the son of Alphonso H. and Minnie Snow…after her recovery she learned that when she was dying, he also had died unbeknownst to her."[427]

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[424] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 16-17.
[425] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 41.
[426] Moe, *Visions of Heaven,* 24.
[427] Ella Jensen.

ii) Richardson - We stay and remain in family units. AND He says that family has an eternal function, and he adds it is the central unit of our society. [428]

iii) Wayman 358 As I came near the dimension of Earth and my waiting body, I saw a multitude of my ancestors. …they all appeared to know me well. I recognized my great grandfather Clarence. I knew him instantly…I learned here that he was one of my life guides."[429]

(25) AGE AND PHYSICAL WELLBEING OF FAMILY EVERYONE IS YOUNG AND HEALTHY.

i) William Wallace Raymond 1881 "They all look young and beautiful."[430]

ii) Dr. Wiltse before 1892 "I discovered that I had become larger than I was in Earth life and congratulated myself thereupon. I was somewhat smaller in the body than I just liked to be, but in the next life, I thought, I am to be as I desired… *How well I feel,* I thought."[431]

iii) 1939 Brother **Cox**'s wife asked him, 'Did your mother look natural?'; and he said, 'Oh yes, my mother looked so good, and she has the Best of health.'

iv) Before 1967 Mr. Wikins from Spanish Fork – "He saw a group of people under a tree, and his mother came to him from this group. She looked more beautiful than she had been in life. She was surprised to see him and asked why he had come now, when his family on Earth needed him."[432]

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[428] Richardson, *The Message*, 54,87,116.
[429] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love,* 358.
[430] William Wallace Raymond.
[431] Dr. Wiltse.
[432] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. p. 6 The Robber Tale, Returning from the Dead. Dec 1967 Riverside CA. Collector Mark Molen. Informant Mrs. Nadine Adams Norma Wilkins, her aunt, told her this story about Norma's father-in-law Mr. Wilkins.

v) Rives sees her grandmother: “She now no longer was elderly and gray, but rather young and vivacious. Her dark hair, slim figure, and animated gestures made me smile. It appeared we were both in our prime and about the same age.”[433]

vi) Drummond noticed his wellbeing and absence of pain in the Spirit World: “there was something different about me. In this moment I was whole. Complete. Not only did I not feel any pain, but there was no longer any damage to my hand. In fact, any scars I'd acquired over the years were gone, any aches or pains from sports injuries were absent, and my receding hairline was now a full head of glorious hair. In a way, it was an odd sensation, like when the whir of an electric appliance suddenly shuts off. You don't realize it's a constant irritation until it's no longer there, but the relief you feel is palpable and refreshing.”[434] He felt no pain, no worry out of his body, and life’s challenges seemed insignificant.[435]

vii) Freeman “Grandma looked younger than she had on Earth,”[436]

viii) Lawrence Tooley - He sees in a 1976 vision, his recently deceased grandfather as a younger man in Spirit World.

ix) Durham. She had been so crippled up in life, yet here she appeared physically perfect! They both seemed young, too, in their late twenties or early thirties! [437]

x) Wallace describes grandmother “She appeared to be about twenty-five years old, but her hair was glorious white, and everything about her was radiantly beautiful. Her body was glorious,”

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[433] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 98.
[434] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me About Living*, Ch. 5.
[435] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me About Living*, Ch. 6.
[436] Freeman *Led by the Hand* 52.
[437] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 30.

Wallace met friends "Some had already lived on Earth and died, and some had not yet been born. All the memories of my existence before Earth came back to me, but I was told that I would not retain them, that they were for this place only." [438]

xi) Richardson said his grandpa Mark who had been old and sick now looked 25-30 years of age, in his prime.[439]

Richardson - I turned to behold the faces of some of my closest relatives…Randy McMillan who had died nearly 20 years earlier from leukemia. He looked great. He said "Lance, it's so good to see you!" They knew he was coming,[440]

xii) R. Jensen - "I immediately recognized these family members, even though they looked much younger l would say in their mid-twenties. Yer they also looked much more mature. They each had a radiating beauty and glow, which defies adequate. description, with countenances filled with joy, love and peace."[441]

xiii) Moe's guide was her father-in-law. Whom she met at the gold door of heaven and who said that God had sent him to her... Instead of being old 'he has an aura of indescribable beauty, of youth and health.' She also described how everyone is fit, healthy and free from physical and mental ailments and disease, having perfect bodies and looking like they are 30 years old.

C LIFE REVIEW

(26) Life review upon arriving home. self-judging

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[438] Wallace, *The Burning Within,* 109.
[439] Richardson, *The Message*, 53
[440] Richardson, *The Message*, 52
[441] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 17.

LDS life review is linked to the PLAN of your life promised before birth. There are two plans 1. plan of salvation for all humans and 2. plan for each soul. (Are there more life reviews in the modern VTEs? Does this correspond with the rise in individualism? Family vs ego/me. Not everyone experienced a life review.) Pedersen for example didn't but he did have an 'interview' with the Holy Spirit before he could enter the city of paradise. (106) Craig Lundahl mentions a pregnant woman experiencing a miscarriage, entered other dimensions and reached the light. She saw how angels delivered the spirits of children to the new body just before birth during her own life review. IN this life review she also perceived how her actions were perceived and affected others. 'I was shown another child that I would have if I returned to life.' (Sorensen p. 89-91) 127[442]

i) Charles John Lambert 1886 Charles was trapped underwater and drowned. When I recovered consciousness, I was no longer in the body, but my spirit was out of the water. No human power could describe my condition. Every action, and even every thought of my life, good, bad and indifferent, was clearly before my comprehension. I could not tell by what process this effect was produced, but I knew that my whole life in detail was before my view with terrible dearness. 'There were spiritual persons with me, and I understood that they also knew all about the nature of the deeds I had done in the body.'[443]

ii) Thos. S. Thomas 1894 "memories of your past are made plain." [444]

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[442] Lundahl, Craig R. "Near-Death Visions of Unborn Children: Indications of a Pre-Earth Life." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 2 (1992): 123–28. Sorenson, Michelle R, and Dr. David R Willmore. *The Journey Beyond Life*. Sandy, UT: Sounds of Zion, 1988, https://archive.org/details/journeybeyondlif00sore.

[443] Charles John Lambert.

[444] Thomas, *Glimpse of the Future,* 58.

iii) President George Albert Smith VTE 1909 wrote in 1947 A panorama of life passed in review before George.[445]

- Everything I had ever done passed before me as though it were a flying picture on a screen—everything I had done. Quickly this vivid retrospect came down to the very time I was standing there. My whole life had passed before me. I smiled and looked at my grandfather and said: "I have never done anything with your name of which you need be ashamed."[446]

iv) Tooley In his life review he judged myself "total recall of my life from the time when I was born until the accident when I had died." "My whole life passed before my eyes as if I were viewing a very vivid film. It was moving at a very high speed, and yet I could view each scene that unfolded with crystal clarity and the speed seemed normal to me. [447] His review had both speed and clarity. As he saw scenes of his life unfold, he reports seeing how he had increased in spiritual development and advancement (me – i.e. this is reason for Earth life) AND As he embraces his family members, he feels their life in Earth through a panoramic life review.

v) Durham '"What have you done for your fellow man?" He asked me then with His wordless communication, and instantly my entire life was before my eyes. It wasn't like I was seeing a movie, with scenes laid out in sequence.'[448] She saw interpersonal life events from different perspectives and then felt forgiveness for others and then for herself.[449]

vi) Menet - Her life review seen in a window that opened up in front of her She saw her whole life in seconds. She relived each experience and re-lived her feelings. She also felt the feelings of those with whom she interacted. [450]

vii) Drummond After taking in my new surroundings, I noticed the guide who had brought me to this place suddenly wasn't there anymore. Normally, I would expect to feel

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[445] "Your Good Name," Improvement Era, March no. 3 1947, 139, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/c14b44ac-51e4-46cd-96f9-eaf1220b0608/0/0.

[446] The Improvement Era. The Editor's page, March 1947, No. 3, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/c14b44ac-51e4-46cd-96f9-eaf1220b0608/0/0

[447] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 933, 951,1577.

[448] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 31.

[449] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 33.

[450] Menet, *There Is No Death,* 43.44.

discomfort, nervousness, or even some feelings of abandonment once I realized he wasn't there. Instead, despite knowing I was alone, I felt the continued love and acceptance of everything around me, and I didn't feel fear or anxiousness —just the continual peace. What happened next, though, is still hard for me to share. In the next instant, I found myself immersed in a replay of my life from birth to twenty-eight years old. Unlike watching a video on a screen, it was more a reliving of every moment of my life—experiencing every choice, pivotal decision, and milestone, but through the critical lens of the wisdom and maturity I attained over the course of my stunted existence. Going back, I saw how my parents raised me and reexperienced interactions with my brothers and sister. I reviewed all the activities we went to and witnessed all the time and effort my parents put into my welfare—especially the lessons they taught me—and the huge investment of time, money, and support they put into my sports. This deep dive into my past showed me all the good things I'd done but also the bad things. With this reliving, there was no room for argument, no explanations or justifications, and no whining. It was what it was—black and white. Now I could see my actions for what they really were. Yes, I'd made some unfortunate decisions—and I felt a deep disappointment and shame in myself because of it—but whoever had given me the opportunity to relive my life's experiences seemed to lift my chin and smile with compassion I felt I didn't deserve. Whoever this higher power was only exuded love, patience, and unconditional forgiveness. Instead, at the end of my life's reliving, a command came to move forward, toward the beautiful white cloud."[451]

[451] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me About Living*, Ch. 6.

viii) Wallace 1985" A series of pictures, words, ideas, understanding. It was a scene from my life. It flashed before me with incredible rapidity, and I understood it completely and learned from it." "I understood every reason for everything I did in my life. And I also understood the impact I had on others." … "Nobody was there to judge me."[452]

ix) Tom Gibson 1992 "all of a sudden, I became conscious of my past life being reviewed for me. It seemed to occur in a short period, and I felt the Savior's love during the entire process."

x) George Albert Smith, 1909, the eighth president of the Church, had a review of his life after he died. "Everything I had ever done passed before me as though it were a flying picture on a screen-everything I had done. Quickly the vivid retrospect came down to the very time I was standing there. My whole life had passed before me."[453]

xi) Rowe 2004 "began to see scenes from my life played out."[454] Rowe **:** Lord's plan for me and for his children, specifically about the fact that I was there in the Spirit World for a brief visit, and that the Lord had a plan for me."[455]

xii) Fenimore Life review and the perspectives of others. She saw a large screen and saw a 3-D replay of her life. "I experienced every part of it from all points of view and all points of understanding. I knew how each person felt who had ever interacted with me" As each picture flashed, she became immersed in the event and memory and reexperienced events with all her

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[452] Wallace, *The Burning Within,* 91,94.
[453] Tom Gibson.
[454] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 9.
[455] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 11.

senses. "The scene seemed so familiar and so real" She saw scenes from her childhood. She was not viewing her life alone; another male and non-judgmental presence was there. 89[456]

xiii) Freeman and the Book of Life "Christ took me into a room lined floor to ceiling with books as white as milk. A high table sat in the center of the room. Christ moved over to one wall and pulled a book with a cover like pearl from its place on the shelf. It was huge, about three feet long and two feet wide. It had a binding like the big old books in the basements of a library or city hall, only it was much cleaner than any book that sat on an Earthly shelf. Christ seated himself on a stool and laid the spotless book on the high table before him. He opened the pages, pulled out a pen the color of new snow, and began to write.' In this book, I am writing of the perfect love you have for your children;' he said. She adds 'Everyone has a story in this book"[457]

xiv) Call "She had a life review, and her guide was with her throughout. She says that this was the most loving part of her experience. She could feel herself from a number of levels and she had access to the universal love of God. She felt compassion for herself. She saw where she had made a difference in people's lives… When she was a child, she had witnessed a person's wrongdoings. In the life review she encountered this person again. She realized that she had not got over the abuse she had seen this person do. Amy was still angry with this person, but in the life review she connected with this person and came to understand this woman, felt God's love for this woman, and understood how to feel love for her enemy."[458]

> **xv) Rowe's** life review took place in the library as part of her witness historical records He told me that he was going to show me some parts of the Book of Life, which is like the universe's supercomputer system. These records contain every deed, word, thought, feeling, intent and action that has ever occurred at any time in the history of the world.

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[456] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,* 84,89.
[457] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 108.
[458] Call, YouTube.

He opened the book and directed my full attention to the page he opened. It listed my name. He showed me specific passages. It was a book of records about MY life." She had a review of all world history and her own life. AND "I began to see photos or snapshots of myself, beginning with me as an infant, going through different stages in my life, and leading up to the present day. Some of the pictures included members of my family-my parents, my siblings, my husband, my children, and my extended family. My attention was directed to what looked like a large movie screen. In front of me I watched as scenes from my life appeared on the screen. It was as if I were watching a detailed movie of my life. At various points during the "movie," there were blanked out areas. I understood that these represented specific things in 102 my life that I either had repented of, or still had need to repent" [459]

ARRIVING HOME.

(27) THE PREMORTAL LIFE AND RETURNING HOME.

i) May Farnsworth 1888 She conversed with messengers for four weeks before her death and saw her future home. She was happy about 'going home'. May Farnsworth died age 14 1888 - She felt happy in the thought of "going home," as she termed it – it was such a beautiful place. She told her father to make her coffin fully large, and was prayerful day and night during her sickness… Her faith was strong until the messenger told her the time had come, when she expressed an earnest desire to go to the Home Beyond.[460]

ii) Mosiah Lyman Hancock (1834-1907) reported in his journal of having a spiritual vision of the preexistence "He testified that when he was 21 years old in **1855** the Savior told him 'Your time is now come to take your mission on Earth', and he laid His hands on my

[459] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow* ,101.

[460] Deseret News 1888-12-29 Miscellaneous Publisher Salt Lake City, Utah: Deseret News Pub. Co., https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/desnews9/id/13569. "Deseret News 1888-12-29 Page 1," n.d., https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/desnews4/id/10248/rec/1.

head…and set me apart for that important mission. He again said to me 'I will see you safely through until you return again." [461]

iii) Thos. S. Thomas "Millions of souls waiting to come to Earth" [462]

iv) President George Albert Smith 1909 had been seriously ill and had to rest in a tent in St. George UT. He was too weak to turn over in bed and lost consciousness. "I realized, or seemed to realize, that I had finished my work in mortality and had gone home.[463]

v) Herman Stulz 1921 "My memory of my pre-mortal life came back to me, and I remembered that I had given the promise that after I was born into this Mother Earth, when I hear the everlasting gospel preached, I would accept it and do the Temple work for my kin."[464]

vi) Ricks Despite the unfamiliarity, I had a strong sensation of *deja vu* in this space. [465] I felt that the place where I now resided was my real home and was where I truly belonged.

vii) Tooley - Home "I feel like I've returned home" [466]

viii) Olsen "It was familiar. It was home."[467]

ix) Rives "I found that I was in a room that seemed ancient. It felt spiritual and peaceful, as if it had been used for eons of time, yet it was familiar. A loving tide of awakenings swept over me. I immediately knew where I was. It was the room I had occupied before my birth into

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[461] Where do we go from here. Wesley White 38 and Mosiah Lyman Hancock, 1834-1907Autobiography (1834-1865) Source: Autobiography of Mosiah Hancock, typescript, BYU-S. Compiled by Amy E. Baird, Victoria H. Jackson, and Laura L. Wassell (daughters of Mosiah Hancock). Reference, "Autobiography of Mosiah Hancock (1834-1907)," Joseph Smith Foundation, September 11, 2018, https://josephsmithfoundation.org/autobiography-of-mosiah-hancock-1834-1907/.

[462] Thomas, *Glimpse of the Future,* 64.

[463] President George Albert Smith, The Improvement Era, The Editor's page, March 1947 No. 3, https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/c14b44ac-51e4-46cd-96f9-eaf1220b0608/0/0.

[464] Herman Stulz.

[465] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 20,26.

[466] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1024.

[467] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 31.

mortality. This was my room. There, in one corner, was a twin bed with a bedspread that was dusty rose in color."[468]

x) Richardson – "Yes, I was home again"[469]

xi) Freeman – "Grandpa Scholes showed me his apartment. I was surprised that it was small and sparsely furnished, not one bit like the house he'd lived in on Earth. Before I could even ask him, Grandpa said, "This is my little bachelor pad:' He winked at me, and I was sure he could read the confusion on my face. 'Tm waiting for your grandma to get here so we can build our home in heaven together:"[470]

xii) Ricks Despite the unfamiliarity, I had a strong sensation of *deja vu* in this space. [471] I felt that the place where I now resided was my real home and was where I truly belonged.

xiii) Tooley- "I feel like I've returned home" [472]

xiv) Olsen "It was familiar. It was home."[473]

xv) Rives "I found that I was in a room that seemed ancient. It felt spiritual and peaceful, as if it had been used for eons of time, yet it was familiar. A loving tide of awakenings swept over me. I immediately knew where I was. It was the room I had occupied before my birth into mortality. This was my room. There, in one corner, was a twin bed with a bedspread that was dusty rose in color."[474]

xvi) Freeman – "Grandpa Scholes showed me his apartment. I was surprised that it was small and sparsely furnished, not one bit like the house he'd lived in on Earth. Before I could

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[468] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 100.
[469] Richardson, *The Message*, 65.
[470] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 97.
[471] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 20,26.
[472] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1024.
[473] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 31.
[474] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven* ,100.

even ask him, Grandpa said, "This is my little bachelor pad:' He winked at me, and I was sure he could read the confusion on my face. 'Tm waiting for your grandma to get here so we can build our home in heaven together:"[475]

xvii) Pedersen - He saw other spirit bodies of patients who died in the hospital, and he followed a patient on a medical flight and saw him die too. ""I watched the man die and saw his spirit come out of his body. One instant I was looking at the man and the next instant his spirit was standing beside me. In another instant a tunnel of light opened up and all the spirits disappeared into it."[476]

(28) VIEW OF THE PAST PREMORTAL LIFE

i) Ricks experiences his premortal life.[477] He found himself f in a grove of trees.

> I perceived this representation to symbolize the life I lived before being born into mortality. It was as if went back in time into a pre-Earth spiritual dimension. Perhaps I had once stood in that very spot in times past. Maybe it was a favorite place I frequented in my premortal state to quietly meditate or prepare for my future mission on Earth.[478] There is, however, one thing that has stayed with me all these years-an actual knowledge, and not just a belief in the existence of God, the premortal existence of man, and our continued existence after our mortal bodies die. 24 He remembers before he is born place of pure joy and happiness. [479]

ii) Tooley – "Memories of our pre-mortal life and of the promises I had made were becoming more focused."

"We had been together here for millennias of time before being sent to the Earth", he says of himself and his wife. He had promised to marry her in the Temple. He hadn't done that yet. They had four small children. [delay from his previous inactivity) AND The memory of his

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[475] Freeman, *Led by the Hand*, 97.
[476] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 90.
[477] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 23.
[478] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 22.
[479] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 23.

pre-existence comes back AND He has a vision of a beautiful meadow, hundreds of children playing, and a vision of his premortal wife. He remembers their arrangement to meet on Earth, get a Temple marriage and plans for children to join them.[480]

iii) Eadie - Referring to the figure she identified as Jesus Christ she said, "I knew Him, and I knew Him before". (referring to her own pre-birth existence in heaven) "I knew heaven was my home."[481] "I knew that I had known him from the beginning, from long before my Earth life." [482]

iv) Durham - When Durham met Jesus, she remembered being with him in an earlier life before her birth. At this time, she was not yet LDS, she converted because she later discovered that church teachings matched her experience.[483] Later she remarks that 'In connection with my memory of a premortal life I realized that I was part of a "family" that had been around when this Earth was formed from matter in the heavens, and I understood how this family had been organized. I knew not only that I had a Father in heaven but a mother as well, and that every living soul, including Christ, was the offspring of eternal parents. It was the time I had spent living with these parents, prior to my mortal birth, that I was now being allowed to remember. Her angel guide reveals her premortal life to her, her choice of Earth family, and explains she is born to experience life lessons and spiritual growth.[484; 485]

v) Daybell "had experiences with spirits and experienced visions of his premortal life and his role in the Second Coming."[486]

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[480] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1101, 2075.
[481] The Astroboy9 Channel YouTube, "Oprah Winfrey Interviews Betty Eadie." 2011.
[482] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light*, 42.
[483] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 30.
[484] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 82
[485] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 40
[486] Daybell *Living on the Edge,* 150

vi) Wallace - "Scene after scene of living truth passed through me: history on Earth, history of our existence before Earth, principles, facts, things that I had had no conception of. I saw them. I experienced them, literally becoming part of each scene. I saw that we all stood before our Father before coming to Earth, brothers and sisters in eternity. I experienced this anew, 107 just as I had experienced it in my own pre-mortal life." [487]

vii) Fenimore – When she met God the Father, she felt she had met him before. I was captivated by His beauty. Yet as much as God filled me with wonder and awe, I was certain that I was not meeting Him for the first time. There was a tremendous familiarity about Him. While I was not remembering *details* of a life before my mortal birth, I was reacquainting myself with the life that I shared with the Father, a spirit life that seemed to extend to the beginning of the universe.[488]

viii) Mendenhall Jesus took her to her premortal life "I saw everyone there like 3-D [489]

ix) Richardson - He remembered things he had promised before his Earthly birth to do in his life that he had not yet fulfilled. Old promises he had made to God.[490]

x) R. Jensen visited his premortal life and states that when we come to Earth, we lose all memory of it.: "I testify this Earth life is but a hyphen between the two spheres of pre- and-post-mortality."[491] He describes:" three stages of life-premortal, mortal, and post-mortal existence."[492]

(29) VIEW OF THE PAST – IMMERSION IN HISTORY SINCE CREATION ONWARDS - HISTORICAL REVIEW

Just as the individual has a life review, some people experienced a community 'life review' including the history of the world, and the universe since creation. This history also

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[487] Wallace, *The Burning Within,* 107.
[488] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,* 101.
[489] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 26.
[490] Richardson, *The Message*, 89.
[491] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 45.
[492] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 47.

contains scenes of a possible future, both in terms of a personal life and in terms of the future of the world.

i) President Joseph F. Smith 1918 shared a vision he had the previous day, at the Semiannual General Conference of the Church. He saw the Savior's visit to the spirits of the dead while His body was in the tomb. He also sees the righteous dead assembled in paradise and Christ's ministry among them. [493]

ii) Elder David B. Haight 1989 - "I heard no voices but was conscious of being in a holy presence and atmosphere… I was shown a panoramic view of His Earthly ministry: His baptism, His teaching, His healing the sick and lame, the mock trial, His crucifixion, His resurrection, and ascension. There followed scenes of His Earthly ministry to my mind in impressive detail, confirming scriptural eyewitness accounts. During those days of unconsciousness, I was given, by the gift and power of the Holy Ghost, a more perfect knowledge of His mission. I was also given a more complete understanding of what it means to exercise, in His name, the authority to unlock the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven for the salvation of all who are faithful."[494]

iii) Mendenhall is shown the history of all creation and all the history of world and Biblical events, including the time of the Savior on Earth.

iv) R. Jensen "Jesus took him on a tour of His life from the pre-mortal to present time."[495] R. Jensen learns not only about history but how it ties into Theology and among many matters and topics he discusses the Council of Heaven, Lucifer being expelled, Eternal Laws, the Plan of Salvation, Celestial Exaltation, obedience, eternal law, war in heaven, theology of the

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[493] Doctrines & Covenants Section, 138.1-24, Doctrine and Covenants 138 (churchofjesuschrist.org).
[494] Elder David B. Haight.
[495] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 21.

keys of redemption awarded to Jesus by Elohim, the Father. He adds “All of us were witnesses to the Earth's creation, but the Veil of forgetfulness has hidden it from our present memory.”[496]

v) Freeman Christ introduced her to the founding fathers of the United States “After introducing me to George Washington, Christ went around the room with me to meet Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson, John Adams, and all the rest of the Founding Fathers of the United States of America.**”[497]**

E CHILDREN IN THE SPIRIT WORLD, BOTH BEFORE AND AFTER EARTHLY BIRTH.

(30) CHILDREN

i) R. Jensen answers the dilemma of those parents unable to have children on Earth: “If our lives, for one reason or another, are such that having a family is impossible, we will have a chance to create a family during the Millennium of Peace”[498]

ii) Ella Jensen saw a relative teach school. One of the children there was, she thought, still on Earth, but after she returned, she found out the child had died while Ella was ill. [499]Another woman saw children being taught in school[500]

iii) Bertha Deusnup Elder 1913

"Bertha was then taken into another room where there were many children. On the far side of the room, she saw two little girls, whom she did not know. They were so beautiful she could not look away from them. '"Do you want them?' the guide asked. '"Yes. Oh, yes,' she responded quickly; 'Can I return to Earth life and have them?"' The escort told Bertha that she could have them and explained, "That is the purpose of this visit, to let you see them. Now we

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[496] Jensen, *Taught by Christ*, 54-62, chapter 6.
[497] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 102.
[498] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 47.
[499] Crowther, *Life Everlasting,* 1967.
[500] Lundahl, *Social Positions in the City of Light,* 231–38. (See in this article, Carver (1881):235).

must return." Bertha then returned to her body and in time, recovered fully from her illness. Then Bertha told Jonathan she wanted more children. They moved again, this time to Oakley, Idaho, where Bertha had a baby girl whom she named Alberta. Two years later, Bertha had another daughter, LaVirle. Bertha always felt strongly that these two daughters were the little girls she had seen in heaven."[501]

iv) Mary Hales 1925 saw her sister who had died as a nine month old baby "She was with other children in a little clearing in a pine forest. … "The children were seated on sawed-off logs while the older women taught them. The children seemed happy, and the forest setting for their school was one of the most beautiful places I have ever seen."[502]

(31) CHILDREN WHO DIE IN INFANCY AND UNDER THE AGE OF EIGHT (AGE OF BAPTISM)

i) Loisie M. Goates 1890 who died after giving birth to twins, sees her stillborn boy - **there** was William Goates, not yet dead in his Earthly clothing showing to me he was not yet in place. "I saw my own little ones and wanted to take my baby Louise that I recognized in a lady's, my husband's mother's, arms, when I was told no, not yet.[503]

ii) Archie J. Graham 1918 "I was gazing upon some of the most beautiful homes or palaces-for no

castle of any Earthly king could surpass them in beauty ... children and all kinds of animal life ... added real life to its beauty. There were numerous parks and playgrounds, filled with happy and intelligent children. They were kind and generous in their play. Everything

[501] Bertha Deusnup Elder.
[502] Mary Hales.
[503] Loisie M. Goates.

seemed to be love and smiles." "I was informed, however, there were no children under the age of eight years, as the atoning blood of Jesus Christ has paid for all children under that age,"[504]

(32) MISCARRIAGES AND ABORTED CHILDREN

i) Sarah Hinze one of the most prolific writers on children and the premortal life has written about her own personal experience with her unborn child. Since the Spirit World is there both before and after death, many VTEs include those not yet born, and is not limited to a simple afterlife scenario. Her books describe both LDS and non-LDS stories of children and their parents interacting before their birth. She writes:

> "Before each of our nine children was born, I sensed that he or she was preparing to come to Earth. I prayed for the safe arrival of each of these special spirits. I received the gift of increasing visits from my preborn through the Veil… it was their time to come to Earth with a personal mission only they could fill. We were honored by a prebirth visitation from Becky's future brother, who was announcing it was his time to come to Earth. The sacred experience faded as my future son concluded his mission and departed. I have come to understand that the unborn often visit their future families and homes.[505]

She calls these visits, 'these hallowed experiences', and describes her own spiritual visions:

> With my fifth pregnancy I sorrowed greatly upon losing the baby to miscarriage. I had felt this gentle female presence with me before she was even conceived. During the three months her tiny Earth body grew within me, her spirit self would occasionally enter my dreams and share with me her love. After the miscarriage I feared that I had lost her forever.
> Then God comforted me. Within two months I was shown in a dream that I had only lost this girl child temporarily ... that she would have a second chance for birth through me. I saw her mature spirit. I marveled at her radiance. Her shoulder-length brown hair was pulled back behind her head, and her large brown eyes were inquisitive. She was apprehensive about her sojourn on Earth and reluctant to leave behind the loving environment and special friends of the premortal realm. However, in this dream she committed to come to Earth ... she called me "Mother."
> Several months later in dream-vision I was shown a hospital room. I saw every detail-the narrowness of the room, the window, the bed, the television. I saw the door open and a nurse walk in with a little bundle. I rejoiced when she placed a beautiful baby girl in my arms. As I awakened from the dream, I sensed a divine, loving, male presence standing in the doorway to my bedroom. In a distinct voice, he decreed of the female infant I had just

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[504] Archie J. Graham.
[505] Hinze, *Coming from the Light*, 5-10.

seen in my dream, "Her name is Sarah. Her name is Sarah." Not many days after this miraculous experience I conceived again. Eyes closed, a vision unfolded in my mind. I saw my spirit self departing our heavenly home. The celestial firmament was enveloped in brilliant light, an eternal burning of holy flames that did not consume. It was the place where God dwells. As I continued traveling down through the stars, the pace accelerated. Comfort appeared in a presence, a strengthening escort who emerged by my side. Reawakening to my immediate surroundings, I found myself in prostrate humility, flat on the floor. I sensed a Being of power enter the room. I felt compelled to rise. I felt totally immersed in the love of this great Being. I begged Him to heal my body for the sake of the child within me. In answer, He conveyed these words to my mind: "I am the Great Physician. I will heal your body, and this baby will be born whole and well, for I have so decreed it….The door opened and a nurse walked in with a little bundle. She placed the gift in my arms. *As* I looked deeply into the eyes of my beautiful baby girl, it was as if I heard the proclaiming voice echo from the past, "Her name is Sarah. Her name is Sarah." At last I held my namesake-Sarah Rebekah-the sweet baby of my dream, whose Earthly body had miscarried on the first try, now returned to Earth as promised, our mortal child.[506] By this time I was overcome with tears of the Spirit. We were honored by a prebirth visitation from Becky's future brother, who was announcing it was his time to come to Earth. The sacred experience faded as my future son concluded his mission and departed. I have come to understand that the unborn often visit their future families and homes. Our future son departed, but within a month he came again to impress upon me that the time had arrived for his conception.

I shared this message from the celestial timetable with my husband and conceived within days. Near the end of the first trimester of pregnancy, I was visited a third time by our future son's spirit. He announced, "My name is Matthew." Each time that I had been privileged to be in the presence of my preborn, Matthew, I sensed his predominant personality traits-love and gentleness. Suddenly my preborn son Matthew appeared, standing before me dressed in white, tall and well-formed. I saw his dusty blond hair and handsome rugged features. He thanked me for the sacrifices of pregnancy I was undergoing, nurturing his body within me so he could come to Earth and begin his mortal mission. He informed me he would be born within a few days. Then he was gone. This precious son was born a week later, bringing a spirit of heavenly unconditional love to our family.[507]

(33) VISIONS OF THE UNBORN BEFORE BIRTH ON EARTH

[506] Hinze, *We lived in Heaven,* 1 - 5
[507] Hinze, *We lived in Heaven,* 6-7

One report mentioned by Craig R. Lundahl, is from 1913 when Bertha was told by a guide that the two girls she met in the Spirit World, would later be born as her daughters. This theme has come up in the work of Sarah Hinze and other VTEs. [508]*** (Nelson 1988 37-39) 175

A woman pregnant with her third child hemorrhaged and felt her spirit exit her body looking down on her surgery from above. She entered a tunnel and saw a bright light. She reports that some of the people she met in the Spirit World became her future children. [509](Nelson 1988 107-9)

i) Harriet Beal saw her younger siblings playing.[510]

ii) Ella Jensen – She saw a room filled with children. “They seemed to be convened in a sort of Primary or Sunday School presided over by Aunt Eliza R. Snow.” While there she saw a boy who she thought to be alive, the son of Alphonso H. and Minnie Snow…after her recovery she learned that when she was dying, he also had died unbeknownst to her. She said “there was one experience that seemed very strange, and I could not understand it. ' 'You know your little son, Alphie, has been in my Sunday School class in the First ward. I have always loved him very much. While I was in Aunt Eliza R. Snow's class of children in world, I recognized many children. But all of them had died excepting one, and this was little Alphie. I could not understand how he should be among them and still be living. “The parents visited her, and she was told by Minnie that “He died early this morning while you were so very sick. We knew you loved him and that it would be a shock to you, so we did not tell you about his death.”[511]

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[508] Craig R. Lundahl, “Otherworld Personal Future Revelations in Near-Death Experiences.” *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 3 (1993): 171–79.

[509] Lundahl, *Near-Death Visions of Unborn Children*, 123–28.

[510] Harriet Beal.

[511] Ella Jensen.

iii) Before 1963 "A mother with 13 children died in childbirth. Dead for four hours. She was approached by two spirits who said she must go back and in time give birth to them. She did go back. It was painful for her to get back into her body. She lived to bear two more children. This story was told to me by her 15th child."[512]

iv) Before 1964 "A farmer in Corrine – driving tractor – overturned and got pinned under it. The spirit left his body and stood above it. He saw his crushed body. It felt good to be out of the pain filled body. He was about to leaven when he saw a man and a woman sprit and they spoke to him and told him that he had made a promise to the, that he would provide them with bodies. So, he felt obliged to return to his body. He recovered and later his wife bore two more children, a boy and a girl."[513]

v) 1964. A story that came down to Gordon Rees. "A woman had two children and she and her husband did not want anymore. Woman got sick and died in the night. Her spirit went to heaven. She walked in a big garden and saw children sitting under a tree – a boy and a girl, crying. She went to comfort them but could not comfort them. They said, "We can't go down to Earth because we don't have anyone to go to on Earth, we don't have anyone because our parents won't take us." She felt sorry for them. She asked who their parents were, and they said her name. She felt bad, she asked the Lord to let her go back and have however many children

[512] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Recounted by Jean Hurst 1964 who got from Caroline Croxton BYU Grad who heard it from a friend in 1963 who was the daughter of the woman to whom it happened.

[513] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Recounted by Jean Hurst 1964.

he'd give her. She came back in the morning. She had the girl and then the boy and then several more children. [514]

vi) Heber Hale I was surprised to find no babies in arms. I met the infant son of Orion W. Rawlings, my first counselor. I immediately recognized him as the baby who died a few years ago, and yet he seemed to have the intelligence and in certain respects the appearance of an adult.[515]

vii) Henry Zollinger - "My guide then showed me the spirits of the children that would yet come to my family if we would be faithful. They were full grown but not in the same sphere as those who had lived upon the Earth.

viii) Tooley sees his dead sister Woman is his dead sister Wendy who died as a baby. Age in heaven is adult. Children who die have pure hearts so their robes glow with purity and they can go to the celestial kingdom They have no sin Wendy teaches him She has achieved this degree of glory[516]

ix) Wallace meets her son waiting to be born.

> I belonged on Earth for him, I understood, and I immediately felt guilt for my selfishness. His name was Nathaniel, and he hadn't been born on Earth yet. He said that if I didn't go back, his own mission would be hindered" [Child – she is told she can't have kids but later has two more.] Her reason to return was "I have a child waiting for me. I came back to give him birth." She has a girl and then later a boy. [517]

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[514] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Recounted by Gordon Rees who got it from Marybeth Raynes, 21, a BYU student, from Ashland Oregon. Story from her great Aunt who'd heard it from her sister-in-law. Ms. Raynes heard the story in 1959 but the even happened 5-10 years before. I got it in Provo March 1964.

[515] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho. Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).

[516] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1559.

[517] Wallace, *The Burning Within*, 116, 198.

x) Freeman 'died' from ectopic pregnancy complications. Babies who are miscarried can choose to be reborn or have that count as their short Earthly experience.[518] Aborted and miscarried children reside in a special area of heaven awaiting a new birth. Freeman points out that this is not reincarnation. "The reassigned children area is one of the most beautiful places in heaven"[519] Whilst visiting this area she meets a boy who 18 months later becomes her son Wesley Hyrum.[520] She also meets her daughter lost in the pregnancy, called Brooke, who decides to stay in heaven and become an angel instead of coming to Earth again. That was her choice.[521] She also met a David George Stewart who was not yet born. A year later he was born in her family and died the same day he was born.[522]

xi) Holland Young reported meeting her yet unborn sister in her VTE, after she passes away a daughter is indeed born. "I'm here with my sister and she really wants to come down and be a part of our family…two years later this little sister Hinckley Jane Young was born."[523] The theme of the book is that all our lives are part of God's plan for us, our births, and our deaths.

xii) Pedersen met the child of a friend who had died in a car accident whilst pregnant. "I could see that the spirit of the unborn child had returned to the Spirit World and was now waiting to be assigned to a new birth mother. I was shown several candidates including the sister of my friend's wife."[524]

F PHYSICAL ASPECTS OF THE SPIRIT WORLD

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[518] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 114.
[519] Freeman, *Led by the Hand* 118.
[520] Freeman, *Led by the Hand* 121.
[521] Freeman, *Led by the Hand* 113.
[522] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 132.
[523] Young, *Meant for Heaven,* 111-112.
[524] Pedersen *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 99.

(34) REALNESS OF THE PERCEIVED EXPERIENCE AND PERCEIVED REALM

i) Charles John Lambert 1886 "What I have described, however, was as real as anything could be, and was not imaginary." [525]

ii) Lorena A. Wilson 1915 said about her near-death experience, "it seemed real and natural."[526]

iii) Hannah Adeline Savage 1900 commented; "There was a guide dose by my side, and he talked to me and showed me the spirits who were beings real as we are."[527]

iv) Heber Q. Hale 1920 I know that I actually saw and experienced the things related in this Heavenly Manifestation, and they are as real to me as any experience of my life.[528]

v) Ricks 1966 "everything seemed so incredibly real… the whole experience' seemed more vibrant and real than the reality we experience here on Earth." [529]

vi) While telling his wife about his experience, **Tom Gibson** said, "It was as real as ... anything I have seen or felt on Earth-even more so."[530]

vii) Amy Call's description exemplifies the very real and physical nature of this other realm." I was astounded by how Earthy... how even animal-like people can be on the Other Side. One might expect that upon entering through Death's Door, there would be sudden enlightenment; that maybe everyone would realize absolute goodness and choose Light and a

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[525] Charles John Lambert.

[526] Lerona A. Wilson, *An Open Vision: An Afternoon With My Deceased Parents* (Courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

[527] Hannah Adeline Savage, *Record of Hannah Adeline Savage* (Provo, Utah: L. Tom Perry Special Collections, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University), 3-5.

[528] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho. Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).

[529] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 20.

[530] Arvin S. Gibson, Margaret and Marshall Gibson, An Old-fashioned Love *Story: A Biography* (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

fresh start, possibly becoming more angelic and purified, but in that place, everyone came in exactly as they'd been before."[531]

(35) WHERE IS IT?

i) Heber Q. Hale My first visual impression was the nearness of the world of spirits to the world of mortality.[532]

ii) R. Jensen "The spirits worship in the same chapels that we use to worship in here in Earth. The Spirit World is very close, and it co-exists beside us here he says. It is here on Earth and not beyond the sun. "As Brigham Young noted-and I clearly witnessed-the postmortal Spirit World simply co-exists with Earth life in an entirely different dimension that is invisible and imperceptible to us. Upon dying, any heaven or paradise we go to is right here-this is why we call where we will go the 'Here-after."[533]

iii) Pedersen ""Is it possible that the Spirit World is really this close?" I thought."[534]

iv) Lance Richardson He saw towering peaks, massive cliffs, splendid, jagged crags,[535]

v) Nelson 1994, "It was as if I was in a different dimension"[536]

(36) BEAUTY OF THE SPIRIT WORLD

i) John Powell 1867 wrote: The houses and trees were beautiful to behold. I was so amazed and so delighted that I requested my guide to permit me to stay and dwell there, for all

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[531] Call, YouTube.
[532] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho. Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).
[533] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 42.
[534] Pedersen *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 96.
[535] Richardson , *The Message*, 100.
[536] Nelson, *Beyond the Veil*,153.

things were far in advance of this world" [537] "I was transported to the most beautiful place I have ever seen, so beautiful I cannot adequately describe it.' (Nelson 1989 p. 83)[538]

The City of Light is like Earth but more beautiful. [539]

A child told his father that he had been to the most beautiful place. [540]

ii) Martha Jane Boice 1840 told her loved ones about the loveliness of the Spirit World when she was allowed to return briefly to mortality. "She remained the two hours allotted to her, bearing testimony to the Gospel and praising God for the beauties which she had seen in the Spirit World."[541]

iii) Harriet Ovard Lee 1860 – "beheld the mountain gradually draw nearer to us, and soon I could see that it also was inhabited. The people who lived on it looked just as happy as the inhabitants of the former mountain looked miserable. Some were reading books, some walked about, and all were busy. The children played and romped around, while the grown people, especially the men, were very busy, and it seemed to be such a beautiful place."[542]

iv) Thos. S. Thomas He describes nature, beautiful rivers, all the colors of the rainbow, the ground a carpet of green, trees and birds, / "The flowers have a language that you understand." He sees a grand city and homes and hears music beyond what is attainable on Earth.[543]

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[537] Sullivan "5 Insights into the Spirit World".
[538] Widdison, *The Physical Environment in the City of Light*, 239–46.
[539] Widdison, *Physical Environment in the City of Light*, 239–46. (Also see Nelson, *Beyond the Veil,* 1990)
[540] Widdison, *Physical Environment in the City of Light*, 118.
[541] Martha Jane Boice.
[542] Harriet Ovard Lee.
[543] Thomas, *Glimpse of the Future*, 106,104,105,106.

v) When eleven-year-old **Mitchell Dalton 1895** returned back to his body, he was unhappy at having to leave the Spirit World. "He opened his eyes and said, 'Oh, Papa and Mama, why did you call me back. I have been to such a beautiful place.'[544]

vi) 1896 Jennie Schnackenberg "she beheld beauty everywhere…. green hills, birds, flowers, …and everything I beheld smiled at me. She danced and sang with happiness."[545]

vii) 1915 A girl called Preale - "She was sensible to the last. She rallied once and then said she had seen such a beautiful place…"[546]

viii) Mary Hales 1925 said, "We started walking together through a place that was much like Earth, but much more beautiful."[547]

ix) Sheldon Parks 1955 "He had an incident, seizure, lapsed into unconsciousness. He saw Spirit World and sensed he was in an entirely different environment – beautiful surroundings, peaceful, beyond his power to describe." [548]

x) 1957 Regina Russon "Regina died. A doctor came and pronounced her dead. Half an hour after the Doctor left, while they waited for the mortician, the child opened her eyes and said, "It's alright mother, it's just beautiful here" After that she closed her eyes and was gone again."[549]

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[544] Mitchell Dalton.

[545] Jennie Schnackenberg, 1896-, *Jennie Schnakenberg Letter, Sioux City Iowa to Bureau of Information.* Salt Lake City. Manuscript on Microfilm call # MS 12663 (100005015776) Church History Library.

[546] BYU Provo Special Collections. Box 6, folder 7. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends FA02 Box 6 3 1197 232570702 FA 01-355 Copy letter from the Book of Remembrance of Larry Jardine, BYU student at Provo. 1915 written by Larry's Gt Grandparents to his Grandparents. Clarkson May 4th.

[547] Mary Hales.

[548] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Recounted by James A Randall May 12, 1961. Sheldon Park's Bishop.

[549] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. 'Returning from the Dead.' Madge W. Hutchings Lehi Utah Jan 1968. Madge, from Lehi UT, who is middle aged, talks about her sister and niece about an event in 1938. By Kathleen Hutchings.

xi) 1956-7 Brother Carl DeHaven "said he was aware of very beautiful music coming from a distance and he could see an indescribably beautiful sight surrounding him and he felt drawn to it, with a strong desire to turn away from the scene below and go towards the music."[550]

xii) 1962 - A man reported his wife's experience. "She was declared dead. Two and a half hours after she had been declared dead, a slight pulse was detected She opened her eyes and held her husband's hand. She said, "It's beautiful there." "I wish you could come now with me, but I will be waiting there for you when you die. I just wanted to come back and tell you. She smiled, closed her eyes, and then died."[551]

xiii) Ricks experience feels real and more beautiful than anything he had ever seen. [552]

xiv) Drummond expressed how all plants and animals and even the clouds in the sky were alive and "It felt like each living thing had its own spirit and that spirit conveyed love."[553]

xv) Rives "beauty of the nature about me."[554]

xvi) Rowe "I was surrounded by beauty everywhere I turned." [555]

xvii) R. Jensen "It is as easy to go to the Spirit World as it is to rise from a chair. It was as easy to return as it is to sit back down (except for the pain…) (In Spirit form) My awareness of myself and what was around me dramatically and vividly increased."[556]

(37) INEFFABILITY – INADEQUACY OF OUR FIVE SENSES

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[550] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10. p.8-9. Testimony of Brother Carl DeHaven Oregon. Reported by Mrs. Wilbur E. June Wilson, Vernonia Oregon 1973. This happened around the winter of 1956-7.

[551] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6, Folder 9. Recounted by Mary Ann McAllister, 1962.

[552] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* viii.

[553] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me About Living*, Ch. 5.

[554] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 95.

[555] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 11.

[556] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 39.

i) Ricks language to describe his experience is inadequate [557]

ii) Tooley - says he has "inadequate vocabulary' to describe the 'beauty the sights and sounds, and feelings I experienced on my journey to the other side of the Veil.'[558] Kingdom ruled by beauty and order (me- in American cultural terms this is defined!) 1406 Nothing is out of order no weeds no trash - kingdom of the Father is beauty and order. Harmony discord occurs only when people leave God's teachings[559]

iii) Wallace - We simply don't have language that adequately communicates the beauty of that world.[560]

iv) Drummond "As I looked around, it was difficult to process how beautiful this new place was. How do you describe things you've never experienced before—especially when you have nothing to compare them to? It's like explaining how salt tastes to someone who's never tried it. It was wholly unique."[561]

v) Richardson - "around me, the beauty seemed almost indescribable." [562]

vi) R. Jensen "much of the spiritual depth of my Spirit World experiences, was beyond the adequacies of mortal language to convey."[563]

NATURAL ASPECTS OF THE SPIRIT WORLD

i) A dear friend of my mother's aged 65 had Bright's Disease. She became ill and like dead for several hours but returned to life. Disease vanished. "She spoke of entering a mist. She

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[557] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* xx.
[558] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 247.
[559] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven*, 1353, 1406.
[560] Wallace, *The Burning Within*, 101.
[561] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me About Living*, Ch.5.
[562] Richardson, *The Message*, 56.
[563] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 9.

felt as if she were floating on the cloud, like boughs of fruit blossoms. The fruit was rare and delicious beyond any she had ever tasted. She visited many of her friends at their homes {me-physical houses] She heard music all about her. It was soothing and beautiful and filled with soft melodic voices. She said she has never heard anything that could compare with this richness."[564]

ii) 1977 Sellesa Hurd Snarr "I remember I saw this, it was like a stream through the middle of--it looked like in the forest, but it was a stream and there was a tree on the other side, and there was a bunch of grass all over and a whole bunch of flowers along the stream, and I remember I saw those little girls jumping the rope and they were really cute."[565]

(38) MUSIC

i) Joseph Eldridge, great grandfather of Inez Robinson Preece (Smith) 1833 "Then I heard very beautiful singing and beautiful music, but I could not see the musicians. I joined in the singing most heartily."[566]

ii) Harriet Ovard Lee 1860 "and I heard the most beautiful singing…. They also were happy, some singing."[567]

iii) David P. Kimball 1881 "I heard the most beautiful singing I ever listened to in all my life. These were the words, repeated three times by a choir: 'God bless Brother David Kimball.' I at once distinguished among them the voice of my second wife, Julia Merrill, who in life was a good singer. This, of course, astonished me."[568]

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[564] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Recounted by Mary Ann McAllister 1962.

[565] Sellesa Hurd Snarr. Idaho LDS age 46 . Written in 2016 by the collector, Jody Hansen, who is a BYU student is in her ward. See:https://lib.byu.edu/search/byu/record/cdm.folklore.278?holding=3n6rslxlozi5aqe7 https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/folklore/id/278.

[566] Submitted by Inez Robinson Smith. Written in 1947. *Life Sketch.* Call # MS 10812 (1000050000202) (Manuscript on Microfilm) MS 10812. Joseph Eldridge, born in 1825, great grandfather of Inez Robinson Preece (Smith) who inherited his life story in his journal dated 1937. Church History Library.

[567] Harriet Ovard Lee.

[568] David P. Kimball.

iv) Ella Jensen said "I could see people from the other world and hear the most delightful music and singing that I ever heard.[569]

v) Ricks "I could also hear continuous heavenly music, including a choir singing praises, to their Creator, but I could not tell what direction it was coming from." [570]

vi) Ricks "A full spectrum of colors in the garden grove, the flowers, and the surrounding atmosphere glistened with light and exceeded in beauty anything I had ever laid eyes on before. It seemed as if I was witnessing colors I had never seen with my naked eyes." [571]

vii) Tooley Hears musical ecstasy. [572]

viii) Durham - 'the most beautiful, peaceful music I had ever heard.' [573]

ix) Menet - soothing music heard.[574]

ix) Freeman - "music' I heard a heavenly choir with herald angels burst into glorious song, every note pitched to absolute perfection."[575]

x) Mendenhall - "There are hills and waterfalls, trees and flowers. There are roses everywhere with colors we don't have here in this life… music came from the roses."[576]

xi) Wallace - "the whole garden was singing. The flowers, grass, trees, and other plants filled this place with glorious tones and rhythms and melodies" [577]

xii) Rowe - "I heard beautiful melodic music" (11) "I heard the most incredibly beautiful music."[578]

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[569] Ella Jensen.
[570] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 22.
[571] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 21.
[572] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1043.
[573] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 19.
[574] Menet, *There Is No Death,* 40.
[575] Freeman *Led by the Hand* 50.
[576] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 49.
[577] Wallace, *The Burning Within*, 101.
[578] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 11,13.

xiii) Moe "I also hear music. Each note is profound, strong yet whispering. Its soothing ebbs and flows swirl around me and through me. I reach toward the sound and light, yearning to see more and to be enveloped more fully in God's love."[579] (6)

xiv) Richardson - Sees spirits playing music on keyboards[580]

xv) Wayman- beautiful music coming from another realms.[581]

(39) COLORS AND HEIGHTENED SENSES

i) Jacob Hamblin 1858 It [the place] was divided into compartments by walls, from which appeared to grow out vines and flowers, displaying an endless variety of colors. [582]

ii) Mr. Bertrand 1892 Mountain in the Swiss Alps He had a stroke. said he felt more alive after death than before and that his mind remained dear and functioned normally. 'Well,' thought I, 'at last I am what they call a dead man .... How strange! I see better than ever, … When my companions return, they will look at that and exclaim, 'The professor is dead!' Poor young friends! They do not know that I never was as alive as I am, and the proof is that I see the guide going up rather by the right, when he promised me to go by the left." Mr. Bertrand then discovered that he was rising upward. He said, "I had only two wishes: the certitude of not returning to Earth and the discovery of my next glorious body, without which I felt powerless.

iii) Peter E. Johnson 1898 "I was lying on a bed, burning up with the fever, and the elders who had been sent to ascertain my condition were very much alarmed. They 62 stepped out of the room and held whispered consultations. They were so far away that under ordinary

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[579] Moe, *Visions of Heaven,* 6.
[580] Richardson, *The Message*, 75.
[581] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love,* 353.
[582] Jacob Hamblin.

conditions I could not have heard what was said, but in some manner my hearing was made so keen that I heard their conversation as well as if they had been at my bedside.

iv) Heber Hale 1920 The vegetation and landscape wee beautiful beyond description, not all green as here, but gold with varying shades of pink, orange, and lavender, as the rainbow.[583]

v) Eadie "The eyes of the spirit see in more dimensions than the eyes of the mortal body"[584]

vi) Menet 1979 Her eyesight was so enhanced she could see for miles. A tremendous feeling of peace came over her [585]

vii) Drummond "The individual elements were Earthly— ground, sky, grass—but the colors and feel were beyond anything I'd ever seen or felt before… [describing wildflowers] their colors! I've never seen colors so brilliant. They were ten to a hundred times the vibrancy of any colors we see here on Earth. Everything before me was beyond description in terms of brightness, infusion, and saturation of color. Colors we see here on Earth are dull by comparison."[586]

viii) Rives "Roses of every color and shade of yellow, orange, pink, purple and red surrounded me."[587]

ix) Wallace - "The colors were indescribable. We may have fifty or a hundred tints of orange in this world. In that one there are millions. I saw tinges of orange that defy comprehension. Shades of rose and hints of pink stretched on forever, every subtle shade a

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[583] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho. Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).
[584] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light*, 30.
[585] Menet , *There Is No Death,* 30.
[586] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me About Living*, Ch.5.
[587] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 94.

unique color, every color connecting in perfect harmony with other colors, and every arrangement a miracle." and "It was as if every blade of grass, every flower, every tree, had a unique prism from which light and spirit exploded." [588]

x) Olsen "I felt real, but I was nor injured. I was not a floating orb. I was myself. The same as I had always been, only now bathed in this familiar and amazing light. My natural senses were magnified to a greater degree."[589] "My perceptions were expanded."[590]

xi) Lance Richardson - 'I instantly perceived I was entering into a most magnificent dimension or sphere which far surpassed the beauty of any place I had ever visited. The peace was consuming and the beauty transcending.' 'Immediately in front of me stretched a lush lawn of emerald hue yet mixed with a combination of sky blue. I had never seen such a vibrant brilliant color.'- numerous and impressive trees. "Leaves and sprigs carried varieties of color such as crimson, gold, blazing yellows of fire, shades of green and blue and deep blood red. One stem may have numerous flowers of different variety and color…. I was enthralled by the beauty." [591]

xii) Rowe - "There were flowers that were of the most vibrant and beautiful colors and varieties far more than what are found on Earth and visible to the human eye." [592]

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[588] Wallace, *The Burning Within,* 102.
[589] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 31.
[590] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 35.
[591] Richardson , *The Message*, 51,52.
[592] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 13.

xiii) Moe - 'The colors are more vibrant than any on Earth. Red is not simply red. It is brilliant and shimmery, appearing co have gold flecks in it… The hues are so vivid that they seem to be alive.'[593]

xiv) Wayman - I saw swirls of multi-dimensional colors, an endless color spectrum that swirled into a vast wall of whiteness in the distance. [594] AND Harp music played gently in the background and the notes glided through my being.

xv) Ricks Next, I found myself standing high on a mountainside, in the midst of a small, inexpressibly beautiful garden grove. I was surrounded by what appeared to be aspen trees, a variety of flowers, and other pleasant forest plant life. Some of the flowers looked familiar, and some were of a variety I had never seen before, with variations of colors I had never laid my eyes upon. The trees and the plant life on the forest floor were similar to what we might find on Earth but were far more glorious and otherworldly.[595]

(40) ANIMALS

i) Rowe - "In the lake I could see all manner of fish swimming around. There were varieties I have never before seen on this Earth." "Animals go to heaven, but there is a place reserved for all of the Lord's creations." [596]

ii) Mendenhall "She sees horses, alligators, rabbits and dogs and swims with the dolphins. Jesus and I then flew like the birds alongside an eagle."[597]

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[593] Moe, *Visions of Heaven,* 6.
[594] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love,* 353, 356.
[595] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 21.
[596] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 22.
[597] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 49-52.

iii) Richardson [reported Animals in Spirit World. He communicated mind to mind with the lion. He petted him and they communicated love. A deer and fawn walked by the lion. All lived together in peace. He also saw a golden eagle soaring overhead. [598]

iv) Pedersen "I found that I was in the midst of a beautiful park. There were animals roaming peacefully in the park. This is the only time during my spiritual sojourn that animals were present. The park was a wonderful combination of forests, manicured gardens, streams, lakes and mountains."[599]

v) Moe says that pets await us in heaven, she adds "Animals (and all other living things) have spirits and when they die, they go to heaven too." [600]

(41) PLANTS, TREES AND FLOWERS IN THE SPIRIT WORLD

i) 1856 Jedediah Grant told Heber C. Kimball that "I have seen good gardens on this Earth, but I never saw any to compare with those that were there. I saw flowers of numerous kinds, and some with fifty to a hundred different colored flowers growing upon one stalk." . . .[601]

ii) Jennie Schnakenberg 1896 "I beheld beauty everywhere. Green, green hills, birds, flowers and everything I beheld, smiled on me."[602]

iii) President George Albert Smith 1909, after an experience with the spirit world, described the part of that world he saw:

"One day … I lost consciousness of my surroundings and thought I had passed to the Other Side. I found myself standing with my back to a large and beautiful lake, facing a great forest of trees. There was no one in sight, and there was no boat upon the lake or any other visible means to indicate how I might have arrived there. I realized, or seemed to realize, that I had finished my work in mortality and had gone home. I began to look around, to see if I could not find someone. There was no evidence of anyone's living there, just those great, beautiful

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[598] Richardson, *The Message*, 100-101.
[599] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 99.
[600] Moe, *Visions of Heaven,* 23. D&C 77:2.
[601] Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:135–36.
[602] Jennie Schnakenberg.

trees in front of me and the wonderful lake behind me. “I began to explore, and soon I found a trail through the woods which seemed to have been used very little, and which was almost obscured by grass.” President Smith followed the trail and after some time met his grandfather, with whom he conversed. (*Improvement Era,* March 1947, p. 139.)

iv) Archie Graham 1918 "To the right and left of us were beautiful fields of waving grain .... [then] we came to a beautiful forest with lawn grass covering the ground; with trees and shrubs of many sizes and kinds and of many different colorings, from a pale green to the deep green of the spruce and pine, several shades of silver and gold, reds, browns, blues and lavenders fading into a light pink. All were planted to harmonize with each other in size, color and kind, and by looking in a certain direction, one could see all colors of the rainbow. "As we were passing through the forest, I thought nothing could compare to its beauty-it was glorious .... we came into the most exquisite flower gardens, wherein were small shrubs and all manner of plant life, beyond human understanding .... There were flowers of all sizes and colors, placed in different artistic designs . . . The flowers varied in size from no larger than a pinhead to those as large as the crown in a man's hat. The shrubs were gorgeous, all sizes and colors-many of them were pruned and kept trimmed to represent birds and animals."[603]

v) Heber Hale 1920 viewing the wonderful sights of landscape, parks, trees and flowers, … I presently approached a group of men, standing in a patch lined with spacious stretches of flowers, grass and shrubbery as a golden hue--marking the approach to a beautiful building. [604]

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[603] Archie Graham.

[604] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho. Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).

vi) Mary Hales 1925 "We started walking together through a place that was much like Earth, but much more beautiful. It was a garden setting with many beautiful flowers of many colors and many green plants."[605]

vii) Brother Anderson 1925 "Brother Anderson was riding his horse and buggy, but the horses startled and ran off into a tree where a limb pierced him. His garments, which he wore for protective purposes were not torn. The next thing he could remember was laying by a little path in a beautiful valley of flowers. "He was very thirsty but his mind then began to concentrate on the sound of approaching footsteps. "It was his mother who had died several years before. She reached down and gave him a drink, then disappeared. He then got up and walked through the flowers." "There was something wrong. All of the beautiful yellow lilies were bent down on the Earth. He lifted them up one by one and they stayed. A great feeling came upon him, and he knew that he was blessed with the gift of healing. When he became conscious the doctors in Utah valley could not understand how the garment had not ripped. From that day forth he had a miraculous way of healing and finding lost people dead or alive."[606]

viii) Stanley C. Parker reported a friend's VTE Circa 1966 "At the time his spirit was out of his body he witnessed some of the most beautiful scenery he had ever seen. Rolling hills and beautiful colors. He said that the color combinations were not the same as we have here but were very beautiful. Also, beautiful flowers and trees."[607]

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[605] Mary Hales.

[606] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10. p. 1-3. 'The Yellow Lillies' Collected 1970 SLC UT. Collector Joye Fischio. Informant Mrs. Gene Fischio middle aged. This happened to her uncle in 1925, and he told her about it.

[607] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10. p.10. To heaven and Back Collected by Louise M Parker SLC UT 1974. Reported by Stanley C. Parker. VTE circa 1966.

ix) Brother Pettersson - "There were cities and villages, lakes and rivers, fields and gardens, houses and mansions, Temples and palaces, flowers and animals of great beauty and variety. The people were busy. Some were building, some were planting, some harvesting"[608]

x) Al was the uncle of a friend of Nancy Bradford**,** whose heart stopped **in hospital,** before **1962 – "**He then recovered. He remembered walking in a huge rose garden where he saw people working among the roses. It was very beautiful. He felt as if he had no cares. He experienced a peaceful completely good feeling of detachment. The rose garden was in a valley, he walked along a road through it that led to a low hill. A man approached him and asked "Al, are you sure you want to go over that road?" Al replied that he had no particular concern and didn't know where the road led. He man repeated the question so Al said to him he was happy in the garden and would go back there."[609]

xi) Ricks has the experience of being in a beautiful garden with trees and flowers[610] All of the plant life and the glorious, sunlit sky seemed to radiate their own light and pure intelligence. Everything had its own vibration that I could feel· and comprehend throughout the experience. It was as if all creation was in the attitude of praising God without ceasing.[611] I found myself leaning face-first against a large stone near the base of a few aspen trees that were on one edge of the grove and next Ito the footpath. Later as an adult in an Idaho Falls Temple he saw a mural that resembled exactly the aspen grove of his STE.[612]

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[608] Sullivan, *Magnificent World of Spirits*, 87-92.

[609] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Recounted by Nancy Bradford 1962.

[610] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* viii.

[611] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 22.

[612] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 55.

xii) Lawrence Tooley - landscape woodland hills, placid lakes, gurgling steams parks pavilions stadiums.[613]

xiii) Eadie - Jesus showed her a beautiful garden in which every flower, every particle of each flower had a life of its own and intelligence. Everything in the garden worshiped and glorified God and sang melodies for him. There was a waterfall, and every drop of water praised God as it splashed down. The garden was of indescribable beauty. A rose swayed in the melody it created in praise of God. "I was able to enter inside this rose and become part of it. I felt love for this rose and my love helped it to grow." she said. "It was explained to her that everything is PERFECTION here, but that what we have on Earth is just a reflection.[614] She describes how she becomes microscopic and with intense joy, she steps into a beautiful rose, inside it, and feels its spirit 81 from this experience she learns that 'We were all one!" [615]

xiv) Eadie - The garden – 'intense colors' "Light in the Spirit World doesn't reflect off anything, it comes from within and appears to be a living essence." plants have intelligence beautiful river fed by a waterfall which also had intelligence. "The music came from the water itself' she says that each drop had a tone, and the water praised God, beyond the ability of any symphony[616]

xv) Elane Durham - "Suddenly I was alive and free, running across a most beautiful field." [617] As far as the eye could see there were white daisies, millions of them… And though the daisies were white there were colors everywhere, incredible and subtle hues of colors that I

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[613] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven*, 1500.
[614] The Astroboy9 Channel YouTube, "Oprah Winfrey Interviews Betty Eadie," 2011.
[615] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light,* 81.
[616] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light,* 78 – 80.
[617] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 19.

cannot even begin to describe. The trees, as well as the grasses and flowers, had a spiritual life force all their own, and again, colors that were unbelievable."[618]

xvi) Menet - The trees grass and plants around her communicated with her. They knew who I was and here happy I was there. They felt love for me. [619]

xvii) Drummond - "the field I stood in didn't *behave* like a normal field of grass; it didn't blow with the wind. In fact, there was no wind to blow the grass, not even a breeze. Instead, it was as if each separate spring-green blade was its own entity with its own personality or soul that *chose* to flow toward me. I remember reaching my arms out to my sides and running my hands along the tops of the grass. When I did so, it was as if each individual gold-tipped blade was…somehow imparting love and acceptance to my fingertips. I could feel love coming from the grass."[620] He described the scene as panoramic, and in his view was a forest of trees with brilliantly colored leaves. The flowers "radiated and communicated love."[621]

xviii) Rives "Instantly, we were standing in a beautiful, green, vast meadow. The grass was a vibrant, green, lush, heavenly carpet."[622]

xix) Lance Richardson Sees more flowers and plants which radiated love coming from their own created spirits…. all plants and animals are God's creations, and He loves them." [623]

xx) Wallace 1985 'garden cannot exist on Earth like the one i saw.' and "We have never seen green in our world like the deep, shimmering green of the grass that grew there. Every blade

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[618] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 19.
[619] Menet, *There Is No Death,* 31.
[620] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me About Living*, Ch.5.
[621] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me About Living*, Ch.5.
[622] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 94.
[623] Richardson, *The Message*, 68.

was crisp, strong, and charged with light. Every blade was unique and perfect and seemed to welcome me into this miraculous place. Profusions of flowers were splashed on the hills in colors I had never imagined. Flowers of all sizes and forms-living, radiating, glorying in their beauty-erupted from the hills and valleys without end." [624]

xxi) Tom Gibson 1992 "suddenly we arrived in this new world. "Anyway, as we walked along the path, I noticed a profusion of flowers and trees. They were of a wider variety and ... had many more colors than on Earth. Or maybe it was that I could see more colors than on Earth."[625]

xxiii) Freeman 1999 'We mingled in a beautiful garden, with perfectly smooth walkways that appeared to be made from the same seamless material as the steps. The walks were lined with flowers that were mesmerizing in their perfection.' Then I realized that not only were they swaying in perfect time to the voices singing in precise harmony, and they were also making flawless music of their own, like an orchestra accompanying the vocals. They appeared to be a type of orchid or lily, and no two flowers were the same. Their coloring was absolutely exquisite. they had a light within them that made them shine with a soft glow, The grass was also perfect, with every single blade the same height, and each piece of grass a brilliant green."[626]

xxiv) Rowe 2004 "I found myself in the middle of a beautiful field filled with the most brilliant green grass I have ever seen. Gorgeous flowers surrounded me," … "There were lakes, rivers and streams, and gorgeous mountain views." [627]

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[624] Wallace, *The Burning Within,* 101.
[625] Tom Gibson.
[626] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 55.
[627] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 11,13 101.

xxiv) Mountains, hills rocks, valleys, grass meadows, forests, trees. (Crowther 1967, Eadie and Taylor 1992, Nelson 1989, Carver 1881) [628]

(42) PLANETS

i) Jacob Hamblin 1858 "During the time my body lay in this condition, it seemed to me that my body went up from the Earth and looked down upon it, and it appeared like a dark ball. The place where I was, seemed very desirable to remain in. It was divided into compartments by walls from which appeared to grow out vines and flowers, displaying an endless variety of colors."[629]

ii) Tooley There are other worlds, apart from the Earth which can be explored.[630]

iii) Eadie God created many other worlds and galaxies.[631]

iv) Menet - [Leaving the hellish place] Then she saw light and a panorama of the Earth. She flies toward it. [632]

v) Fenimore "I was told that there are countless worlds revolving around countless suns, and each is inhabited by children of God, who are subject to these same laws."[633]

vi) Lance Richardson - He could see other planets.[634]

vii) Call She learned about the order of the universe. She saw the bigger picture and how all the stars and planets work like clockwork and how everything below on Earth is a reflection of what is above. She saw the Earth among the other planets and stars. and the colors were just incredible. The colors were vivid, as if they had life in them. She saw the letters NOVATA

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[628] Widdison, *The Physical Environment in the City of Light.* 239–46.
[629] Jacob Hamblin.
[630] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1518.
[631] The Astroboy9 Channel YouTube, "Oprah Winfrey Interviews Betty Eadie," 2011.
[632] Menet, *There Is No Death,* 61.
[633] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,* 126.
[634] Richardson, *The Message*, 71

written above the planet Earth. This, she learned means 'new beginning'. She heard a woman's voice repeating the days of the week in Spanish, followed by the phrase "prepare for the seventh day". The planet then appeared to have a spiritual eye overlaying it, and the eye opened up. She understood that the planet was a being with a spirit, an intelligence and a soul. Her guide took her traveling around the planet, and she received information and understanding. Each country had its own tones, math and frequencies. All is interconnected and each neighborhood contributes a note to the overall harmony.[635]

URBAN AREAS OF THE SPIRIT WORLD

(43) CITIES AND BUILDINGS

i) Lorenzo Dow Young 1826 – "In a moment we were at the gate of a beautiful city, which was opened, and we passed in. I cannot describe its beauty and grandeur. It was clothed in the purest light I had ever beheld, brilliant but not glaring nor unpleasant." [636]

ii) Fine and beautiful cities with streets covered in silk carpets. (Carver 244) [637]

iii) Lorenzo Dow Young – "My guide pointed to a mansion of wonderful perfection and beauty, clothed with fire and intense light It appeared to be a fountain of fight from which emanated brilliant scintillations of glory, but I could form no conception of the extent of these emanations."[638]

iv) Heroine Randall 1830 saw "a beautiful city, one that shone in splendor. The gates were open, and she looked within and saw its glory, and the throng of bright ones, a company of

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[635] Call, YouTube.
[636] Lorenzo Dow Young.
[637] Widdison, *The Physical Environment in the City of Light*, 239–46.
[638] Lorenzo Dow Young.

life, activity, and intelligence. "As she gazed upon the glorious scene, she desired to enter, but her guide said she could not go in, the [sic] she was not yet prepared to enter there. When she asked him why she was not, he answered: 'You have not yet received and obeyed the gospel in its fullness, but if you return to the Earth, to your mortal body, the time will come when you shall have the opportunity to hear the gospel of Christ preached in its completeness, and if you accept it and live faithful to the commandments, you will have the right to enter into the city that you have seen." **Heroine Randall** was with her guide when "they came without the walls of a beautiful city, one that shone in splendor. The gates were open, and she looked within and saw its glory, and the throng of bright ones, a company of life, activity, and intelligence."[639]

v) Harriet Beal 1852 recounts "After some time we came to a beautiful building, very large but as yet unfinished." … they alighted on a porch then she says, "Mother then led me into a most beautiful bedroom… The floors of the bedroom were of gold."[640]

vi) Jedediah Grant 1856 also spoke of the buildings he saw there, remarking that the Lord gave Solomon wisdom and poured gold and silver into his hands that he might display his skill and ability, and said that the Temple erected by Solomon was much inferior to the most ordinary buildings he saw in the Spirit World.[641]

vii) Harriet Salvina Beal (Millet) 1852 saw an unfinished building. "After some time, we came to a beautiful building, very large but as yet unfinished." [642]

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[639] Heroine Randall.
[640] Harriet S. Beal.
[641] Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:135–36.
[642] Harriet Salvina Beal.

viii) David P. Kimball 1881 "I was then taken in the vision into a vast building, which was built on the plan of the Order of Zion. I entered through a south door and found myself in a part of the building, which was unfinished, though a great many workmen were busy upon it. My guide showed me all through this half of the house, and then took me through the other half, which was finished. The richness, grandeur, and beauty of it defied description. There were many apartments in the house, which was very spacious, and they differed in size and the fineness of the workmanship, according to the merits on Earth of those who were to occupy them."[643]

ix) Earl Stowell 1893 "The building on my left was a mansion, a bit old-fashioned by my standards at that time. The building on the right was small, a cottage, I walked up onto the porch, approached the door, and reached for the doorknob."[644]

x) 19th century Ammon Oyler – "He saw his wife clinging to his body and crying. Two men came for him and took him to a most beautiful place, and they went by several very beautiful homes with grass and flowers and trees and finally he came to a very beautiful home. He was told that this would be his home."[645]

xi) Archie Graham saw "Wonderful chapels and public boweries and comfortable seats and beautiful pulpits were to be seen here, being used as places for preaching the Gospel and other subjects of importance ... The business houses were large and well-constructed, dose together and of an average height of six or eight stories." Later he said, "I was gazing upon some of the most beautiful homes or palaces-for no castle of any Earthly king could surpass them in

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[643] David P. Kimball,1881.

[644] Earl Stowell.

[645] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. p.5 A Glimpse of Paradise. Collected Dec 1967 Upland CA by Rex W. Allred. Informant Mrs. Alice H. Allred, a senior in her 70s who heard the story at age 18 about her great-grandfather Ammon Oyler from the 19th century.

beauty. The houses were all large and quite uniform in size and structure, some of stone and some of other materials." **Archie J. Graham 1918** asked his guide how to get a big home there: “What must a man do to inherit a place like that?" Archie asked. "He must live his religion in all things as he understands it," the guide replied. "If much is given much is expected. Keep all the laws of God and pay all his tithes and offerings. To be a servant of God, you must be a servant of your fellowmen. Remain true and faithful to your covenants, always fearing and trusting in the Lord and you will inherit a mansion like unto this, for one of the eternal laws to man is that he shall receive according to his faith or according to his faithfulness to the degrees of knowledge he has acquired through obedience to eternal law."[646]

xii) When **May Neville** went to the Spirit World and met her recently departed brother, he told her that their grandparents had met him when he arrived. May related that he said, "They [his grandparents] had a beautiful home and were preparing a beautiful home for his mother and her family." **May Neville 1917** repeats the idea that lovely homes are being built as a reward for Earthly work. “May put her finger on each one of the family presents and told them of their failings, which they must endeavor to overcome if they would go to that beautiful home which was being prepared for them.”[647]

xiii) Mary Hales 1925

While in the Spirit World, Mary Hales saw homes of various sizes. Wondering at this, she asked her departed brother why some were so large, while others were so small.” Her brother told her that “the size of house one gets in paradise or heaven is determined by the quantity and quality of the good deeds performed.”[648]

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[646] Archie Graham.
[647] May Neville.
[648] Mary Hales.

xiv) Ricks 1966 guide was Jesus **"**He then gently scooped me up into His arms, carrying me off to a beautiful, distant, and radiant City above the clouds. We traveled a great distance through a pillar of light, in an instant, to the city. Many of the buildings, the wall surrounding the city, arid the streets appeared to be constructed in the purest yellow-gold. Gloriously indescribable prisms of light (again with numerous brilliant colors I had never before seen), emanated from the entire city. Even the heavenly light itself seemed to be alive and reflecting the glory of God, while singing joyful praises to him. [649] One appeared to be similar to the design and architecture of the Salt Lake Temple. Another adjacent structure looked like the Salt Lake Tabernacle. Except they both appeared to be constructed of pure gold material.

xv) Lawrence Tooley - 1972 description of streets and buildings small town square. [650] Large trees, oaks lined the streets. 'Large number of homes manicured yards privacy of homes. Spirit World homes built as a result of Earthly deeds good people given amazing homes.

xvi) Menet - She saw a fairy tale little cottage and a dog trotting down the path to it. She could feel its thoughts. Beautiful buildings, fountains, AND "I saw what appeared to be numerous cities filled with magnificent buildings and many people. The cities seemed to glow in the distance like a brilliant light was coming from them. [651]

xvii) Rives "The streets were awe-inspiring. They were paved with shiny, sparkling gold. The buildings were an exquisite white with what appeared to be diamonds in the mortar." [652]

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[649] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 24.
[650] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1024, 1358, 1366.
[651] Menet, *There Is No Death,* 33, 36.
[652] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 96.

xviii) Tom Gibson 1992 - "Daniel next led me to a city. It was a city of light similar to cities on Earth in that there were buildings and paths; but the buildings and paths appeared to be built of materials which we consider precious on Earth. They looked like . . . that is they resembled marble, and gold, and silver, and other bright materials, only they were different—the buildings and streets seemed to have a sheen, or to glow. The entire scene was one of indescribable beauty. . .[653]

xix) Freeman literally saw the pearly gates "The closed gates were at least fifteen feet tall and made of gleaming gold bars twisted together into an intricate design. They were flawlessly crafted and beautiful to look upon."[654]

xx) Moe says that families live in beautiful mansions which are designed and put in surroundings according to the wishes of the family…as if they design their perfect abides. [655]

xxi) Richardson They approach a most magnificent glowing white building, a Temple made of white marble and granite with many steps. It had a courtyard paved in gold. And doors of solid gold. This is also a portal to Heaven. He learns there is a Sprit Prison.[656]

The City of Light is like Earth but more beautiful (Nelson 1990)[657]

(44) TEMPLES

i) Herman Stulz 1921 Herman then continues his narrative. "We approached a beautiful ornamental gate, similar in design to the Salt Lake Temple gate, but my guardian angel ushered me into a waiting room, like the room before one enters the holy Temple, and asked me to wait until he had reported my arrival and obtained permission for me to enter Paradise.

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[653] Sullivan, *Magnificent World of Spirits*, 89-90.
[654] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 51.
[655] Moe, *Visions of Heaven,* 21-22.
[656] Richardson, *The Message*, 72-73.
[657] Widdison, Physical Environment in the City of Light, 239–46.

"I entered a well-lighted room, it had windows all around, small square windows. The light came from the outside it seemed. The only furniture was a long table but no chair to sit down."[658]

ii) Archie J. Graham 1918 "they came to a large white building, grand in design and architecture. Archie declared, "It was glorious, but it is beyond my powers to describe it in full." He said it resembled the Salt Lake Tabernacle, only it was much larger."[659]

a) In an Earthly Temple

iii) Josephine Christian Petersen Brewer 1940s in Mesa Arizona – "Temple apparition - experienced by a lady who thanked her for doing her Temple work. The apparition then disappeared. She was doing Temple work for a 'name' and a woman followed he from room to room, and down to the locker room/ This lady thanked her for doing her Temple work. They discussed Temple work. Then she vanished. It was a heavenly manifestation."[660]

b) Heavenly Temple

iv) Brian Glenn 1993 "He said he went on a trip far away. He saw things he didn't have words for. (INEFFABLE) He pointed to a picture of the Oakland Temple on the Wall and said he had been there and to other buildings like this with the birdies. He saw lots of Temples and birdies there. Some of the birdies were in cages in the Temples and needed our help to get them out. She he told his parents they had to go to the Temple to help them (He referred to ordinances for the dead)"[661]

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[658] Herman Stulz.

[659] Archie J. Graham.

[660] Josephine Christian Petersen Brewer, 1878-1964. *Life Sketch.* Call # MS 12253 (1000050000202) Manuscript on Microfilm) p.1-8. Church History Library.

[661] Glenn, Lloyd Gardner. 'Free The Birdies'. Manuscript on Microfilm. Call # MS 15490 (100000656891) Written by Lloyd Gardner Glenn 1994 for a High Council talk delivered in Lake Forest Ward Santa Margarita CA Stake. In 1993 - His 3-year-old son Brian had been crushed beneath the garage door and rushed to Mission Hospital. Miraculously he survived with no physical or neurological deficits. Church History Library.

(45) CELESTIAL CITY

i) Charles R. Woodbury 1954 "A voice said to me, “This is the Celestial Kingdom, the highest degree of glory. This is the reward of those who in mortal life complied with the new and everlasting covenant of marriage in the Temple of the Lord, and kept those covenants sacred, and if you and your wife continue as faithful as you have been, it shall be your privilege and joy to dwell together in the Celestial Kingdom, in the highest degree of glory, with your loved ones and the Father and Son forever. When this scene dosed, the curtain dropped.”[662]

ii) Tooley 1972 - He is taken to see the Celestial city but can only approach the boundary sees luminescence and light “At the base of the mountain lay a glorious city. Tall spires and pinnacles rose in exalted splendor challenging the clouds above for dominance. Light radiated undulating from the pearlized buildings. A thousand different shades of color filled the spectrum.” The spires had gold capped domes. Larry tells him this is the celestial Kingdom from where Father directs all the affairs of his creation. Only special spirits reside here. For the rest of us we can just view from a distance. ‘Eventual perfection will afford us passage within.’ Until then most stay in the lower kingdoms. He feels the city’s divinity. [663]

iii) Freeman visits the City of Plenty built in Roman style with stone buildings, a city which grows which has giant vegetables and fruits. Next, she visits the City of Enoch where she meets prophets from the Bible and Book of Mormon, as well as other unknown prophets. [664] She visited The City of Helaman.[665]

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[662] Charles R. Woodbury.
[663] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1448, 1463.
[664] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 80.
[665] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 87.

iv) Rowe "We walked toward one of the cities. I say walked, because at first, we started walking toward them, but then we were almost instantly there at the entrance to one of the Cities of Light. We walked along a brick or cobblestone street" [666]

v) Pedersen experienced a plaza, a stadium, and a city called Paradise which can only be entered after an interview with the Holy Spirit, which wasn't what most other Mormons would call the actual Paradise.[667]

(46) LIBRARY

i) Harriet Ovard Lee 1901 said of people in the Spirit World, "Some were reading books." [668]

Homes - One NDEr reported her deceased brother told her that their grandparents had a beautiful home and that they were preparing a home for his mother and family. Another saw many beautiful homes of all sizes. [669]

ii) Tooley 1972 Entry through a suspended arched doorway…white marble benches Saw another door, pictures, and a doorway to a street. She sees names on entrants recorded in a book large desk in a room, bearded man in a white robe writes names of newly deceased in it. [670]

iii) Durham saw a building full of scrolls in which there is an interactive screen like 'sea of glass' around which everyone stood to observe the events on Earth in past and future.[671]

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[666] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow* 22
[667] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 106-107. He says paradise isn't heaven, 125.
[668] Harriet Ovard Lee.
[669] Widdison, *Physical Environment in the City of Light*, 239–46.
[670] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 9710, 989. (see Crowther, *Life Everlasting,* 244).
[671] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 71.

iv) Menet sees library full of books and in interactive screen version of the book of life.[672]

v) Fenimore was given a glimpse of how her suicide you have affected her family and loved ones had she not survived. 'I was given a glimpse of their future… By abandoning my Earthly responsibilities, I would influence my children, my oldest son in particular, to make choices that would lead him away from his divine purpose. [673]

vi) Rowe was taken by her guide to a library, in a large marble building. "there were people-both men and women-sitting at several large rectangular tables reading and studying. These tables were located toward the front end of the library, mostly in long rows." [674]

"I then saw a great panorama of historic events. I clearly remember these because I was shown these scenes in the library, as well as later on my journey-through the "Window of Heaven". "She also saw the future too with the lead up to the second coming and the building of Zion on Earth and the establishment of the New Jerusalem on the American continent... Later she mentions the window of heaven again. "The Window of Heaven." He told me I would be shown many things, some of which were just for my knowledge and understanding. Other things could be shared with close friends and family, while some things could be shared publicly at some point in the future. He counseled me to use wisdom and discretion when sharing and discussing what I had been shown." … "I was shown that once I returned to my body I would be very ill for quite a long time. However, I was also promised that the day would come that I would be healed completely. I was shown that there would come a day, if I was true and faithful

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[672] Menet, *There Is No Death,* 40-42.
[673] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,* 110.
[674] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 27.

to the call the Lord had given me, that I would finally be able to open my mouth and tell my story." She was shown her future not just her past.[675]

vii) Call returned with a warning from her knowledge gained there. She received a warning that the food on Earth is impure and tainted and that food production needs to return to more organic ways. People should learn from Native American and eat simply.[676]

viii) Moe describes heaven as a place of learning.[677]

245 – Nelson 1990 p. 99 records that the size of the house represents the size of someone's good deeds on Earth.[678]

(47) GENEALOGICAL WORK IN LIBRARY

i) Tooley Sees a beautiful white domed building, where genealogical research is done. It has white marble columns. It has shelves of books and manuscripts. Busy - 'people were busing themselves looking through different books.' Larry said that these records are important because ordinances done vicariously, by proxy in the Temple on Earth have to be replicated in the Spirit World to become complete. Larry explains that whatever is sealed on Earth must also be sealed in heaven. Larry teaches "It is important to get sealed in family lines because the longer the lines, like golden links, the more power comes to that group bound by lineage. "Each person is a pure golden link possessing certain powers and glory… As they become sealed their combined powers increase as does their glory, allowing them to rise closer to the glory or perfection of God the Father." [679]

ii) Eadie She saw no books in the library…ideas and knowledge just came into her mind.

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[675] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 30,95,105, 106.
[676] Call, YouTube.
[677] Moe, *Visions of Heaven,* 23.
[678] Widdison, *Physical Environment in the City of Light,* 239–46.
[679] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1151, 1164, 1181, 1202.

iii) Wallace says “"These are the spirits of those that have died," she said. "They are waiting for the work to be done. They're waiting for those on Earth to finish their part of the work." 113 Their part of the work?" I asked. "What work?" She showed me that the people were organized into family units. "You committed yourself to giving your time and talents on Earth to further the work of the Lord. You need these people, and they need you. We are all dependent upon one another."[680]

iv) Rowe mentions records “I could see that inside some of the houses and other buildings that records were being written, kept and organized.” I remember looking in one building and seeing women working diligently at what seemed to be a very rapid or hurried pace. There was a real sense of urgency about them. “I was shown that as our ancestors accept the gospel and receive their ordinances performed on their behalf in the Temple, they are able to continue progressing in the Spirit World.” [681]

B) LINK BETWEEN GENEALOGY WORK ON BOTH SIDES OF THE VEIL

i) Archie J. Graham 1918 “My guide explained, 'Before they can receive either baptism or laying on of hands here, the work must be done for them on Earth, by proxy. It is the same in receiving the Priesthood and all other ordinances .... As soon as this work is done on Earth, they may receive the same over here, by the authority of the Holy Priesthood. It is very important that the people on Earth should turn their hearts more to this work and have the work ready for them; but in nearly all cases, these poor people are ready and waiting long before their work is recorded there. Many have waited for hundreds of years .... ' **Archie J. Graham 1918** “His guide introduced him. "This is Elder Archie J. Graham, your kindred from the Earth." Many in the

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[680] Wallace, *The Burning Within,* 112-113.
[681] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow* 97, 22, 23.

group asked if Archie could come to the Spirit World -that they needed him. But one large man, seemingly a leader, said that Archie should go back to Earth, that they needed him more there so he could do Temple work for them."[682]

ii) Pamela Isaacson 1962 recounts the story of her grandmother's friend's testimony:" a woman said she's had cancer and then been pronounced dead. She was in a beautiful place but then sent back because her Earthly genealogy work had not been done correctly in some of her sealings. They had to be done over and corrected. She didn't want to return to a life of pain. When she returned her cancer was gone. She redid her Temple work and genealogy… The woman bore her testimony and completed her Temple work. That night she was in a bus of people. There was an accident. Only this woman was killed. She had completed her work." Her grandmother met her in the Temple that night and had washed her and listened to her story.[683]

(48) TECHNOLOGY

i) Charles D. Evans 1897 - The appliances for making learning easy surpass all conjecture. Chemistry was rendered extremely simple by the power of the Urims conferred on man of looking into and through the very elements of every kind; a stone furnished no more obstruction to human vision than the air itself. Not only were the elements and all their changes and transformations plainly understood but the construction operations and laws of mind were this rendered equally plain as those which governed the coarser elements. While looking through the Urim and Thummim I was amazed at a transformation which even now is to me marvelous beyond description, clearly showing the manner in which particles composing the inorganic

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[682] Archie J. Graham.

[683] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Recounted by Pamela Isaacson, 1962, recounts story of her grandmother Lottie Crandall who had had the story told to her mother. (It happened during a Temple excursion from a woman from a Los Angeles High School between 1931-1936).

kingdom of nature ae conducted upward to become a part of organic forms; another astounding revelation was a view clearly shown me of the entire circulation of the blood both in man and animals."[684]

ii) George Albert Smith, 1909 the eighth president of the Church, had a review of his life after he died. "Everything I had ever done passed before me as though it were a flying picture on a screen-everything I had done. Quickly the vivid retrospect came down to the very time I was standing there. My whole life had passed before me."[685]

iii) Rives 1979 "The book was of utter curiosity. It worked just as if looking at a television only there was no glass screen. It was moving and alive. It was interactive.

It showed a beautiful meadow bordered with pine and aspen trees. The leaves bobbed in the gentle breeze." She literally enters the virtual world through the screen I the book and has another 'real' experience." A woman, large and round in stature, walked into the meadow and stood in front of the staff. Studying it for a moment, she turned toward me and began to sing the melody, in an operatic voice. Instinctively, I knew she was a hologram. At that moment, I realized I had loved music before my birth into mortality,"[686]

Later Rives saw a device worn by Heavenly Mother and she looked at "in her belt. It was intriguing and something I had never seen before. Drawing closer I noticed it was about four inches wide and was like a movie screen. It depicted different scenes of the ocean. It showed pictures of a calm sea with blue skies and then a yellow oceanside with a pink setting of the sun. The scene then changed to craggy rocks with massive waves breaking upon the shore. The

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[684] Springville UT, Patriarch Contributor. Aug 1894 vol 15, no. 10, 638-641,https://archive.org/details/contributor1510eng.

[685] George Albert Smith, "Your Good Name," *The Improvement Era,* March, 1947, 139.

[686] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 100-101.

picture then changed just as quickly to the inner depths of the sea. I saw many forms of life such as tropical fish, whales, and dolphins, all swimming and encapsulated in the belt. I could not take my eyes off of it, I wondered how it worked and wanted to touch it… As I stared at it, she pulled from it a small seahorse and held it in her hand. She said, "This is symbolic of your son, Dustin. " [687]

5. OTHER AREAS OF THE REALMS

(49) DARK PLACES/SPIRIT PRISON – MISSIONARY WORK

i) Lorenzo Dow Young - Going on from this place my guide said, "I will now show you the condition of the damned." Pointing with his hand he said, "Look." I looked down a distance which to me appeared incomprehensible and gazed on a vast region filled with multitudes of intelligences. I saw everything with the most minute distinctness, and the vast multitudes of people seemed extremely miserable. "These," said my guide, "are they who have rejected the means of salvation that were placed within their reach, and in that way have brought upon themselves the condemnation you behold."[688]

ii) Joseph Eldridge, great grandfather of Inez Robinson Preece (Smith) 1833 "Here I was immediately seized by the evil one who clutching me in his arms was swiftly bearing me off to a place of punishment which I thought to be hell. I cried and screamed to no purpose was my struggle. Then I prayed when a beautiful angel, bright as the sun and swift and terrible as lightning came to my rescue. He struck the evil one on the head and released me from his grip. The fiend fled howling."[689]

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[687] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 108-109, 111.

[688] Lorenzo Dow Young.

[689] Submitted by Inez Robinson Smith. Written in 1947. *Life Sketch.* Call # MS 10812 (1000050000202) Manuscript on Microfilm) MS 10812_Joseph Eldridge, born in 1825, great grandfather of Inez Robinson Preece (Smith) who inherited his life story in his journal dated 1937. Church History Library.

iii) Jedidiah Grant - I never had a view of the righteous assembling in the Spirit World, but I have had a view of the hosts of hell and have seen them as plainly as I see you today. The righteous spirits gather together to prepare and qualify themselves for a future day, and evil spirits have no power over them, though they are constantly striving for the mastery. I have seen evil spirits attempt to overcome those holding the Priesthood, and I know how they act. [690](Heber C. Kimball, in Journal of Discourses, 4:135–36.)

iv) Herber Kimball 1856 said: He saw his wife; she was the first person that came to him. He saw many that he knew but did not have conversation with any except his wife Caroline. She came to him, and he said that she looked beautiful and had their little child, that died on the Plains, in her arms, and said, "Mr. Grant, here is little Margaret; you know that the wolves ate her up, but it did not hurt her; here she is all right."[691]

v) John Peterson 1857 sees missionaries preaching

vi) 1896 Jennie Schnackenberg "Then she felt smothered in darkness. She cried out and said she would obey, and the darkness lifted, and she beheld beauty everywhere"[692]

vii) Thos. S. Thomas 1892 "There is no hell like that which is pictured here on Earth."[693]

viii) Peter E. Johnson 1898 Peter had a near-death experience. In the Spirit World, Peter was told that if he stayed, he would be asked to preach the gospel under the direction of the Prophet Joseph Smith." … "There seemed to be a stand erected close by for the missionaries to preach in."[694]

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[690] (Heber C. Kimball, in Journal of Discourses, 4:135–36).

[691] Lundahl, Craig R, and Harold A Widdison. "The Mormon Explanation of Near-Death Experiences." *Anabiosis* June 1983, v.36, 97-106,(1983), https://emp.byui.edu/satterfieldb/quotes/Spirit%20World/Conditions%20in%20the%20Spirit%20World.html.

[692] Jennie Schnackenberg, 1896-, *Jennie Schnakenberg Letter, Sioux City Iowa to Bureau of Information.* Salt Lake City. Manuscript on Microfilm call # MS 12663 (100005015776) Church History Library.

[693] Thomas, *Glimpse of the Future*, 64.

[694] Peter E. Johnson.

ix) Archie J. Graham 1918 "There was now an even greater number of missionaries, more encouraged in their work, as this class enjoyed the Gospel and was more eager to learn .... We began to see large chapels for worship and many public places erected after the manner of our stadiums, in the open air, for people to sit and hear the Gospel taught, most of these being filled with large crowds." Archie and his guide "They saw more missionaries preaching the gospel and completing genealogy so Temple work could be done on Earth." [695]

x) Henry Zollinger saw several members of his family preaching the gospel. ""We then had the privilege of visiting with my brothers-in-law who had died. William who had been on a mission in Australia. He told me he was presiding over a large mission and was very happy in his labors ... We next went to see his older brother John. I found him discussing the Gospel to a large congregation bearing a strong testimony to them, when he got through, he told me he was very happy in his labors."[696]

xi) Rowe "Missionary work in Spirit World There are two main divisions in the Spirit World. They are known as Paradise and Spirit Prison. I was shown the importance of missionary work as it relates to all of God's children. I was shown that there are millions of people in Spirit Prison who have been and are being taught the Gospel of Jesus Christ." … "Those who have had

accepted the gospel in mortality enter Paradise when they die. Those who have not had an opportunity to hear the message of the gospel and who have not yet accepted Jesus Christ go to Spirit Prison upon death. The spirits in Paradise attend to those in Spirit Prison and encourage them to accept the gospel." [697]

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[695] Archie J. Graham.

[696] Henry Zollinger, *Faith-promoting Collection 1882-1974,* box 2, folder 17. (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

[697] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 97.

xii) R. Jensen "Missionary work is also continuing beyond the Veil among the millions and even billions of the children of our Heavenly Father who have died either without hearing the gospel or without accepting it while they lived on the Earth."[698]

(50) HIERARCHY IN THE SPIRIT WORLD AND HEAVENS (Social/Spiritual level determine one's physical place of abode in the afterlife).

i) William Wallace Raymond 1881 "They all live in perfect order such as I have never seen on Earth… Society is graded something as we are. But money and this world's plenty does not constitute the grade. But it is governed by ability and position in the holy priesthood."[699]

ii) Thos. S. Thomas describes different spheres with the highest inhabited by gods. "In the hierarchy of this sphere you a positioned according to your intelligence and you place yourself where you belong." [700] 70

iii) There is hierarchy and also authority in the universe. As R. **Jensen** says "The heavenly beings were living in a perfectly arrange society. Everyone knew their place and there were priesthood holders. There is always a presiding AUTHORITY in CHARGE."[701]

iv) Apostle Melvin J. Ballard 1900s related one incident where a young missionary was called to the Spirit World. "Some time ago a fine young elder, Elder Burt, received a call to go on a mission-he wanted to go to the South American Mission, so he talked to me about it, and after conference it was decided to let him go to South America. On the way there he lost his life in the sinking of the Vesperous. I was distressed over his father and mother, and I tried to comfort them, for the assurance came to me was that their son was still a missionary, and that

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[698] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 157. Also see: Gibson*, Echoes from Eternity*, 133.
[699] William Wallace Raymond.
[700] Thomas, *Glimpse of the Future*, 70.
[701] Jensen, *Taught by Christ*, 53-54.

God needed him and was using him in a more effective way than if he had gone on his Earthy mission." [702]

v) May Neville 1917 "She (May) said Merrill had come back to tell her what he wanted his mother to know. He told her that his grandparents had met him when he died, and he was with them now. They had a beautiful home and were preparing a beautiful home for his mother and her family. He said it was always springtime over there. "Merrill wished the family not to mourn for him. He said that *so* many of grandpa's people had been killed in the war that his grandfather needed Merrill to help him with his missionary work among his kindred dead."[703]

vi) Heber Hale 1920 – 'That the inhabitants of the Spirit World are classified according to their lives of purity and their subservience to the Father's will was subsequently made apparent. '[He remarks that it is more numerously inhabited than the Earth.][704]

vii) Eadie 'we are all at different levels of spiritual development.' "I understand that there are many levels of development, and we will always go to where we are most comfortable."[705]

viii) Durham was aware of different levels of heaven[706]

ix) Menet - The Spirit World is divided into different levels or kingdoms of glory. God lives in the highest level. Spirits are assigned to their level based on their Earthly choices.[707]

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[702] Melvin J. Ballard, *Crusader for Righteousness* (Bookcraft, 1966), 272.
[703] May Neville.
[704] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).
[705] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light,* 83.
[706] Durham , *Stand All Amazed,* 27.
[707] Menet , *There Is No Death,* 37.

(51) MORAL AND SPIRITUAL HIERARCHY IS MIRRORED IN THE AFTERLIFE IN DIFFERENT LEAVES AND REALMS THAT MATCH THE LEVEL OF THE INHABITANTS.

i) Richardson - This abode is heavenly but the abode where people wait for the resurrection. Real heaven is a higher place where God resides. Randy explained that this was Zion, a Paradise for those who had lived righteous lives.[708]

ii) Wayman "I began gliding downward to other realms, glimpsing into other dimensions. I saw beings of all sorts. / Some angelic with wings, others human.[709]

(52) GOAL OF APOTHEOSIS AND PROGRESSION

i) Tooley He also teaches that "we will one day become one with the father as we become like him." We'' share immortality and eternal life and possess the same degrees of power and glory that he does."[710] There is an entire gospel plan. AND Progression is important

ii) R. Jensen says there is progress in the Spirit World.[711]

(53) NON-MORMONS IN SPIRIT WORLD

Where are all the non-Mormons?

i) Wren 2016 "I briefly saw about 10 people of every religion and nationality from this he learned that not group of people is more important, we are all important to God.

F SOCIETY IN THE SPIRIT WORLD - FAMILY AT THE CENTER/ SOCIAL ASPECTS OF THE SPIRIT WORLD

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[708] Richardson, *The Message*, 65.
[709] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love,* 358.
[710] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1202,1221,1425.
[711] Jensen, *Taught by Christ*, 52.

i) Menet People are gathered into groups of friends and family. [712]

(54) WHITE ROBES

i) Lorenzo Dow Young – Dream like VTE when he was ill and weak, "Standing side by side on the foot-board of the bedstead on which he lay were two beautiful, seraph-like beings about the size of children seven or eight years old. They were clothed in white and appeared surprisingly pure and heavenly. He was certain of being fully awake, and to him these juvenile appearing personages were realistic." [713] In his 1826 VTE "a heavenly guide was by my side dressed in the purest white."[714]

ii) Joseph Eldridge, great grandfather of Inez Robinson Preece (Smith) 1833 "Then the angel took me and carried me toward a beautiful white mountain of marble. I am praising God as I went, he took me to a large white peak where was a beautiful font of white (2) marble filled with water as clear as crystal. Here the angel stripped me of the clothes I had on which seemed to be the same clothes that I wore before death, then he thoroughly washed me and pronounced blessings on me. Then he clothed me with beautiful white garments and robes."[715]

iii) Harriet Ovard Lee 1860 "I also wore a white shroud and robe… Inside sat a tall man clothed in a long, white robe… a great number of women and children playing. They were all dressed in white,"[716]

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[712] Menet, *There Is No Death,* 39.
[713] Lorenzo Dow Young.
[714] Lorenzo Dow Young.
[715] Submitted by Inez Robinson Smith. Written in 1947. *Life Sketch.* Call # MS 10812 (1000050000202) Manuscript on Microfilm) MS 10812_Joseph Eldridge, born in 1825, great grandfather of Inez Robinson Preece (Smith) who inherited his life story in his journal dated 1937.Church History Library.
[716] Harriet Ovard Lee.

iv) William W Raymond 1881 said, "The inhabitants [are] numerous and are natural so much that I could distinguish them by their nationality. They all look young and beautiful and dress quite natural, and the material looks like white silk."[717]

v) Ella Jensen 1891 The people were all dressed in white or cream, excepting Uncle Hans Jensen, who had on his dark clothes and long rubber boots, the things he wore when he was drowned in the Snake River in Idaho. {me- these are the clothes he drowned in)[718]

vi) Charles D. Evans 1893 As I gazed upward, I saw descending through my bedroom roof, with a gentle gliding movement, a personage clothed in white apparel,[719]

vii) 19th century Mr. Whiting "He said he had been in a place where everyone was dressed in white."[720]

viii) Before 1967 Mr. Wikins from Spanish Fork – "was considered dead. Shortly after he revived and stood up. He said he had been in a place where there were many people dressed in white."[721]

ix) 1954 Mrs. Anna Smith - "The man dressed in white told the mother it was not time." [722]**x) 1977 Sellesa Hurd Snarr's** guide, her great-great-great grandmother Anna Kalowski wore a white dress… we had white dresses on. They were down to our ankles, and they were white dresses. [723]

xi) Russell Ricks is comforted by a man in a long white robe, who he identifies as Jesus. I saw a being in a long, white, flowing robe standing in the air, a few inches off the ground. His hands were exposed a little above His wrists, and His robe's hem touched the tops of His feet. [724]

xii) Tooley - met by two men dressed in white. (guides/helpers) Author was naked! They dressed him in a white garment.[725] **Tooley** was met by two men dressed in white. They dressed

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[717] William W Raymond.

[718] Ella Jensen.

[719] 1893, Volume 15 of the *Contributor Magazine*- later known as *The Improvement Era*.

[720] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. 'A Mistake had been made. Tale Rising from the Dead.' Dec 1967 Riverside CA. Collector Mark Molen. Informant Nadine Adams. Story from her father who was told the story by his grandfather from the 19th century.

[721] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. p. 6 The Robber Tale returning from the dead Dec 1967 Riverside CA. Collector Mark Molen. Informant Mrs. Nadine Adams Norma Wilkins, her aunt, told her this story about Norma's father-in-law Mr. Wilkins.

[722] BYU Provo Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02. folder 7 box 6 Anna Eileen Sofenson Smith by James C. Garrick – related to him by Deanna Smith Sudweeks, daughter of Anna Smith.

[723] Sellesa Hurd Snarr. Idaho LDS age 46 . Written in 2016 by the collector, Jody Hansen, who is a BYU student is in her ward.

[724] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* viii, 24.

[725] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 970.

him in a white garment.[726] (He WAS naked) Sees a beautiful woman in a robe. He says that the color of one's robe displays ones inner spiritual level in terms of progression

xiii) Eadie Her tour included seeing cloth looms, clothing for spirits. [727]

xiv) Durham noticed she was wearing a white robe that shimmered. Then she saw that Jesus wore a white robe also.[728] She saw elders wearing white robes.

xv) Rives "Angels dressed in white robes passed nearby."[729]Jesus ears a white robe.[730]

xvi) Freeman "People wearing white robes sat on the grass, talking to one another."[731]

xvii) Wallace "A woman walked toward me dressed in white." [732] Later when she meets others she remarks: "Most of them wore white robes."[733]

xviii) Fenimore She could now see brings of light. She saw spirit messengers of God without a solid bodily form. They were without obvious gender but wore white robes[734]

xix) Richardson - He sees a woman in a white robe called Beverly.[735] Two men dressed in white robes approached…two best friends from the pre-Earth life.[736]

xx) Rowe '**I** was surrounded by the most beautiful women, all wearing white' (5) "I could see two women in white dresses" [737]

Carlos Hjorth met several people in white flowing robes, and his escort (Nelson 1988) 235[738]

(55) FOOD

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[726] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 970,1527, 1541.
[727] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light*, 75.
[728] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 19, 49, 50.
[729] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 95.
[730] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 128.
[731] Freeman, *Led by the Hand*, 56.
[732] Wallace, *The Burning Within,* 95.
[733] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 63.
[734] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,* 130.
[735] Richardson, *The Message*, 74.
[736] Richardson, *The Message*, 88.
[737] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow* 22.
[738] Lundahl, *Social Positions in the City of Light,* 231–38.

This is the ultimate in physicality…food is not required for the body but signifies social interaction benefit and pleasure. On Earth Relief Society potlucks are replicated and ensure continued social bonding. Aspect only of more modern VTEs.

i) William Wallace Raymond 1881 "They eat and drink, and hold meetings like we do, and I ate with them."

ii) Menet - women slice fruit and cake wafers in a kitchen [739]

iii) Freeman had dinner with Jesus, Joseph Smith and Emma," We sat down to a meal of roasted chicken, biscuits, corn on the cob and mashed potatoes with gravy. Again, there was no actual dead chicken sitting on the table. It was all energy formed and flavored in whatever way the diners wished. The corn and potatoes were from Emma's own garden, and it seems that the Lord is particularly fond of sweet potato pie, so Emma had plenty of that on hand for dessert."[740] "my Nauvoo ancestor families invited me to eat at their houses, too."[741]

"The Prophet Joshua led the way to his palace where he served us a feast of roast lamb, rice, huge succulent vegetables, and plump, sweet fruit. Instantly, I realized that this wasn't a dead lamb at all but was simply energy formed in whatever shape was desired. "[742]

iv) Richardson - They have feasts and eat in the Spirit World.[743]

v) Rowe - "I saw a group of women preparing a variety of foods. They were laughing and visiting joyfully, and it was clear they were having a wonderful time together. They were

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[739] Menet , *There Is No Death,* 39.
[740] Freeman *Led by the Hand* 95.
[741] Freeman *Led by the Hand* 96.
[742] Freeman *Led by the Hand* 81.
[743] Richardson , *The Message*, 65.

making what appeared to be a simple meal or snack. There was a variety of bread, some fruit, vegetables, crackers and a beverage." [744]

vi) Moe describes food in heaven[745]

(56) RELATIVES IN THE SPIRIT WORLD HAVE CONCERN FOR US ON EARTH AND DO WORK FOR US

i) Harriet Beal 1852 – She saw her aunt crying and her mother said she didn't want to be sealed to Gorden, a wicked man. So, while her mother told her to do Temple work, she asked that this sealing not be done for her aunt.[746] **Harriet Beal** saw a large room filled with people recording genealogical information. Some NDERs were used as couriers to carry this data to Earth to do genealogical work on Earth. [747]

ii) Mrs. Francis 'Fanny' Woodbury 1890 after her VTE "asked for pencil and paper and write down names of some people who wanted their Temple work done. She paid for this work to be done in St George Temple."[748]

iii) Peter E. Johnson 1898 "I was then informed that my progenitors had made a request that if I chose I might be granted the privilege of returning, to again take up my mortal body, in order that I might gather my father's genealogy and do the necessary work in the Temple for my ancestors." Peter then decided to return. His guide said, "'Good. Your progenitors will be pleased with your decision."[749]

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[744] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 22.
[745] Moe *Visions of Heaven,* 20.
[746] Harriet Beal.
[747] Lundahl, *Social Positions in the City of Light*, 231–38, 234.
[748] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. 'The Voice of the Dead.' Tale Returning from the Dead Dec 19678 Riverside CA. Collector Mark Molen, p. 5-8. Informant Clarence Woodbury 83 yrs. old. The story is about his mother Francis Goddard Woodbury, wife of Orin Nelson Woodbury. The Woodbury family had written down this family history.
[749] Peter E. Johnson, Mission Unfinished, https://ldsfreedomforum.com/viewtopic.php?t=64623.

iv) Henry Zollinger 1920 received requests from Spirit World inhabitants to do their Temple work upon his return. Campbellite Minister asked me if I could do the work in the Temple that was necessary for his salvation. … His wife had come into the church and was baptized after he had died. She spoke to me while I was on my mission in regard to having the work done for him in the Temple. (emphasis on records and Temple work)[750]

Sometimes deceased relatives ask for returnees to do work for them on Earth that they cannot do for themselves in the afterlife. (Nelson 1988, 1989) 234[751]

v) Harriet Beal saw a large room filled with people recording genealogical information. Some NDERs were used as couriers to carry this data to Earth to do genealogical work on Earth. 234[752]

vi) Lorena Wilson 1915 "Her father told Lorena it was important that the Temple work be done for their ancestors. Later that night, he returned and took Lorena to the Spirit World where she met some of her ancestors who were waiting for their ordinances to be done." Her father said these ancestors, "were a good, worthy people, he said, and had accepted the Gospel in very large numbers, and were waiting with anxious hope for the ordinance of baptism .... "Father then said the time had come for these ordinances to be performed for our kindred in the Spirit World, and he desired me to take up the work and see that it was done. I told him that I would."[753]

vii) Lerona Wilson – "Father asked me if I would go to the Temple and take up the

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[750] Henry Zollinger, *Faith-promoting Collection 1882-1974,* box 2, folder 17. (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).
[751] Lundahl, *Social Positions in the City of Light,* 231–38.
[752] Lundahl, *Social Positions in the City of Light,* 231–38.
[753] Lorena Wilson.

ordinance work for our kindred dead." "They were most anxious to be advancing. " [754]

Influence of the departed on the living through the Veil

i) Heber Hale 1920 Men and women everywhere throughout the world are being moved upon by their departed ancestors to gather genealogies. These are links for the chain. The ordinances of baptism, endowments, and sealings performed in the Temples of God by the living for the dead are the welding of the links. Ordinances are performed in the Spirit World, effectualizing in the individual recipients the saving principles of the Gospel vicariously performed here.[755]

ii) Brother Cox 1939 he had been to the Spirit World and found out that his ancestors were

anxious to have their ordinance work done. His mother wants parental sealings done in the Temple. [756]

iii) Before 1972 Joseph R. Murdock ""Then one day I passed away; my spirit left my body and entered the Spirit World. Quite a number of people were there to greet me, relatives, some of them dressed in Scottish costumes. "I expected them to greet me warmly and welcome me to their midst. Instead, they were not at all glad to see me; some even turned their backs abruptly upon me in distinct displeasure. '"Why have you not done the work for us?' they demanded. 'We depended upon you, and you have failed us… Their interest was to have the work done which would bring blessings to them. I had failed them, and they were not at all

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[754] Lerona Wilson.

[755] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).

[756] Brother Cox, 1939.

happy about it. In my great distress I sought for and obtained permission to return to life and make up for my past neglect."[757]

iv) Tooley -They request more genealogical work be done for them on Earth. They say they do genealogy reach there but need help of those on Earth. [why can't God tell them all the answers of their ancestors…aren't they in heaven. [758]

v) Rives 1997 sees her grandmother teaching a class on genealogy. "She invited me in and then introduced me to the group of people before me. She told me they were my ancestors who had lived on the Earth before me. She then told them that I would be instrumental 99 in connecting our family and helping them with their genealogical work on Earth. " [759]

vi) Richardson 1999 - [Randy said many chose to die early, before their birth, so that they could help their families from the Spirit World. Randy tells Lance how he had helped him from the Spirit World. This is one of his assignments][760] Grandfather says he has been helping the family from Earth from the Spirit World. When people pray God lets them help and answer prayers.[761]

vii) Moe 2006 also mentioned that those in the Spirit World can do service by helping those on Earth [interventionist theology] 'I've learned that when I pray out loud, angels (my deceased family members) are able to hear me and they'll start praying about the same thing.' [762]

(57) PRAYER

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[757] Joseph R. Murdock.
[758] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,*1596.
[759] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven ,* 98,99.
[760] Richardson , *The Message*, 86,87.
[761] Richardson , *The Message*, 53,54
[762] Moe, *Visions of Heaven* 24, 34.

i) May Farnsworth 1888 - During the lost four weeks of her sickness, she earnestly called for the Elders to administer to her, hoping she might recover. The messenger that appeared the second time said to her, "May, you are coming very soon." She told her mother what she had heard, and her time had come and that she felt very happy and would not want to return 'only on Ma's account.". She asked the messenger, "Do you answer our prayers?" "Yes, May, "he said. "Will I get well?" she inquired; but he answered not a word. As soon as she told this to her parents their faith failed them in administering any longer and felt ready to give her up and acknowledge the hand of the Lord. During the four weeks she was conversing with messengers she saw her future home but could not describe it. So, she asked the messenger if prayers were answered and he said yes, but he remained silent on her question if she would recover. Her family accepted she would pass and gave up 'administrations'.[763] [764]

ii) Richardson - [Randy said many chose to die early, before their birth, so that they could help their families from the Spirit World. Randy tells Lance how he had helped him from the Spirit World. This is one of his assignments][765] Grandfather says he has been helping the family from Earth from the Spirit World. When people pray God lets them help and answer prayers.[766]

iii) Moe also mentioned that those in the Spirit World can do service by helping those on Earth [interventionist theology] 'I've learned that when I pray out loud, angels (my deceased family members) are able to hear me and they'll start praying about the same thing.' [767]

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[763] Deseret News 1888-12-29. Miscellaneous.
[764] Deseret News 1888-12-29.
[765] Richardson, *The Message*, 86,87.
[766] Richardson, *The Message*, 53,54.
[767] Moe *Visions of Heaven* 24, 34.

iv) Eadie - She saw lights shooting up from Earth and was told that these were prayers. Angels rush to answer the prayers and offer help. God waits for an invitation to help us.[768]

(58) BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY IN THE SPIRIT WORLD

i) Joseph Eldridge 1833 "People are active and busy in the Spirit World."[769]

ii) Harriet Ovard Lee 1860 saw preaching to crowds.

iii) Ella Jensen 1891 had a similar experience when she visited the Spirit World. Elder Rudger Clawson, a late member of the Council of the Twelve who spoke of her experience, said that a "guide was there to meet her and by him she was conducted into a very large building where there were many people, all of whom appeared to be extremely busy, no evidence of idleness whatever." (LeRoi C. Snow, *Improvement Era,* Oct. 1929, p. 977.)

iv) Charles Woodbury 1854 "Everyone was so happy, but all busy."[770]

v) Thos. S. Thomas 1894 – "these souls are now busy" 63 [771]

vi) One elder, **Peter E. Johnson,** who passed beyond the Veil and returned spoke of the order he saw there: "While I was in the Spirit World, I observed that the people there were busy, and that they were perfectly organized for the work they were doing. It seemed to me a continuation of the work we are doing here, —something like going from one stake to another. There was nothing there that seemed particularly strange to me, everything being natural." (Peter E. Johnson, *Relief Society Magazine,* Aug. 1920, p. 455.)

vii) Hannah Adeline Savage 1900 "the spirits who were beings real as we are and I saw they were very busy."[772]

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[768] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light,* 103.
[769] Joseph Eldridge.
[770] Charles Woodbury.
[771] Thomas, *Glimpse of the Future*, 63.
[772] Hannah Adeline Savage.

viii) Mary Hyde Woolf 1914 "All were busy, but the people in the different places would bow to her as she passed by. Sometimes they were so engaged that they took no notice of her."[773]

ix) Outdoor work: Archie Graham 1918 "the caretakers were busily engaged in pruning and trimming trees. and shrubs and cultivating the flowers and lawns." Archie explains that the caretakers then put aside their tools and went to a small arbor to attend a class, which they had twice a day."[774]

x) Heber Hale 1920 The people I met there, I did not think of as spirits but as men and women, self-thinking and self-acting individuals, going about important business in a most orderly manner. There was perfect order, and everybody had something to do and seemed about their business in a most orderly manner… There was much activity within the different spheres, and appointed ministers of salvation were seen coming from the higher to the lower spheres to pursue missionary appointments. [775] **Heber Q. Hale 1920** met his mother: "She seemed to be going somewhere and was in a hurry and accordingly took her leave, saying that she would see me again."[776]

Heber Hale: "All worthy men and women were appointed to special and regular service under a very organized plan of action, directed principally toward preaching the Gospel to the unconverted, teaching those who seek knowledge, and establishing family relationship and gathering genealogies for the use and benefit of mortal survivors of their respective families, that

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[773] Mary Hyde Woolf.
[774] Archie Graham.
[775] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).
[776] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).

work of baptism and sealing ordinances may be vicariously performed for the departed in the Temples of God upon the Earth. The authorized representatives of families in the world of spirits have access to our Temple records and are kept fully advised of the work done therein, but the vicarious work here does not become automatically effective there. The recipients must first believe, repent, and accept baptism and confirmation, then certain consummation ordinances are performed of actualizing these saving principles in the lives of these beings. " [777]

xi) Joseph F. Smith 1918 how the preaching of the gospel was organized among the spirits, and he sees the righteous dead of his day working in the Spirit World.[778]

xii) Sheldon Parks 1955 told James A Randall: "He saw a number of people – didn't recognize them, moving about in a business-like fashion like engaged in a powerful cause. No one spoke to him but he was allowed to stand and observe for several minutes. Then he began to feel pain again and become conscious back in the hospital."[779]

xiii) Tooley -people do class painting and sculpting they have a thirst for knowledge. Absorb knowledge in an advanced was to learn. Larry says that one can choose to slowly read a book but also have the ability to know all its contents, its chemical and everything about anyone connected with it simply by holding it. This includes the emotions of its author as he wrote it. Larry adds "Were able to absorb knowledge by holding or simply touching, seeing, being close to something or by being part of a group." Many things are transmitted telepathically. Knowledge itself is useless without the experience to go with it. people do class painting and sculpting they have a thirst for knowledge. Absorb knowledge in an advanced was to learn. Larry

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[777] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).

[778] D&C 138 53-60.

[779] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Recounted by James A Randall May 12, 1961. Sheldon Park's Bishop.

says that one can choose to slowly read a book but also have the ability to know all its contents, its chemical and everything about anyone connected with it simply by holding it. This includes the emotions of its author as he wrote it.[780]

xiv) Rives found herself in a large auditorium witnessing a music class. In it she saw her own premortal self-participating.[781]

xv) Richardson - [town plaza many busy people walking there working for the benefit of all, doing God's work][782] Each family member explained that they were busy with their assignments and work. There were no idle people. Some were studying. Great order and direction in this world. He saw 'Numerous people grouped in small clusters...reading and having discussions….in intent discourse or thought."][783]

xvi) Rowe "On both sides of the street I saw buildings with people busy at work inside, as if I could

see through the walls of the buildings… I could see that people were busy at work-that everyone there was busy and assigned jobs to do, such as family history work, Temple work, record keeping, missionary work, childcare, and food preparation." [784]

xvii) R. Jensen also describes the theme that those in the Spirit World are busy with work preparing for the end times. He felt his relatives had no time to spare to greet him: "We have more to do to prepare for the Second Coming of Christ than we have time to accomplish." The feeling I received was that I was in their way, preventing them from continuing their work. Then they simply urged me to return to mortal life. The desire to greet them persisted, however,

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[780] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,*1246,1265.
[781] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 102.
[782] Richardson, *The Message*, 88.
[783] Richardson, *The Message*, 67.52.
[784] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow* 22.

and since they would not come to me (for everyone I met there stood straight and still), I went to them, and when we embraced, my heart was filled with joy. As we conversed, I learned that Carol, my parents, and many others I briefly observed, are very busy with their assignments and callings in the Spirit World. There, I had the opportunity to observe what they were doing to help prepare God's children for the resurrection and the Second Coming of Christ."[785]

xviii) Pedersen visited his grandparents' house in the city of paradise. "I looked at my Grandpa Pete's house from the sidewalk, it appeared to be in the middle of a long line of row houses… My Grandma Phoebe was outside working in a flower garden and my Grandpa Pete was working in a vegetable garden close to the back of the house."[786]

(59) KNOWLEDGE GAINED FROM THE VISIT TO THE SPIRIT WORLD/ WE ALL HAVE A LIFE PLAN/ PROGRESSION

i) Archie J. Graham 1918 Is shown both happy and struggling spirits and his guide explains "They choose for themselves while on the Earth, which is the school of experience to test the character of the soul in the flesh, and this is their reward." The guide explains agency to choose between good and evil and the chance for improvement "They always have instructors teaching better ways of living and different kinds of industries. Therefore, the Lord extends His mercy forever unto His children." In his tour the surroundings change so that order and beauty, and neighborhoods reflect higher spiritual levels."[787]

ii) Richardson - Randy (his dead friend) asked Lance to talk to his wife on Earth and explain he was following the plan to her.[788]

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[785] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 17.
[786] Pedersen *Near Death and the Afterlife* 116,117
[787] Archie J. Graham
[788] Richardson , *The Message*, 102-103

(60) EXPERIENCER SEEING FAMILY ON EARTH FROM THE SPIRIT WORLD

Most experiencers saw or met family but others such as Scott Drummond did not.

i) Charles John Lambert 1886 recounts:

> I saw Harrison Shurtliff looking for my body in great excitement, but I had no power to communicate with him. I looked into the water and beheld my body, and wondered why he did not see it: then I observed that I saw dear through the log, under which the body was lying. I saw young Shurtliff, after looking for it in vain, run along the bank a distance of about two blocks, and tell John Harker what had taken place. The two then came rapidly to the spot where the drowning occurred."[789]

ii) William Wallace Raymond 1881 "The people are acquainted with our doings on Earth, but they said it was not wisdom for us to know much about them."[790]

iii) Mr. Whiting 19th century "… then heard his family crying."[791]

iv) Heber Hale 1920 From a certain vantage point I was permitted to view the Earth and what was going on here. There was no limitation to my vision, and I was astounded at this. I saw my wife and children at home. I saw President Heber J. Grant at the head of the great Church… I saw towns and cities, the sin and wickedness of men and women. I saw vessels sailing upon the oceans and scanned the battle-scarred fields of France and Belgium [792]

v) Edna Coray Dyer 1924 "She turned and saw another stage, her kitchen at home in disorder with her lonely father there. He was disheveled and in despair. The voice again asked if

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[789] Charles John Lambert.

[790] William Wallace Raymond.

[791] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. 'A Mistake had been made. Tale Rising from the Dead.' Dec 1967. Riverside CA. Collector Mark Molen. Informant Nadine Adams. Story from her father who was told the story by his grandfather from the 19th century.

[792] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).

she wanted to go. Then she saw another scene, the choir loft in the chapel in her ward. The choir could not sing without her and starred at her with accusing eyes."[793]

vi) Rives 1997 sees her family arguing from the Spirit World via Heavenly Mother's waist tablet screen: "I soon realized we were in the kitchen of my ex-husband's new house. A few years later I would revisit this place and see that it was exactly as I saw it while in spirit. There in the kitchen stood my ex-husband's girlfriend, Nonia, and my son, Dustin. They were in the middle of a heated argument… I then realized my Mother in Heaven was showing me that she had placed my son in my ex-husband's home as an act of love. [794] Jesus then shows her a vision of what her sister and with an angel beside her. "I was looking at the back of my sister, Sandy, in her dormitory bedroom… I was happy to see her and happier yet, when I saw a beautiful, male angel standing beside her. but I knew he knew my thoughts. He was in a long white toga that left his right arm bare at the shoulder… I saw my two nieces sitting on separate couches. Nikki, the youngest, sat the farthest away. She was six years old and had blond hair and big blue eyes. There were three angels standing behind her, singing a beautiful song in heavenly voices."[795]

vii) Tom Gibson 1992"For some reason, about this time, I could see you in our bedroom crying. I was concerned, and I expressed this concern to Peter. "He told me not to worry, that everything would be all right. He said that I was to return to you."[796]

viii) Rowe 2004 "but John told me he was going to show me something of great significance. He directed me to follow him, and within a matter of moments a scene opened up

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[793] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural And Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. A Visit Beyond Dec 1966 Informant Mrs. Jennie Noel Weeks.

[794] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 111-112.

[795] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 134,136,137.

[796] Tom Gibson.

before my eyes. I was shown what was currently going on at home with my husband and three children. To my utter dismay, I saw Jeff kneeling at our bedside sobbing and praying to the Lord. He was in anguish. I could literally feel his pain and it broke my heart. He was crying to the Lord in desperation. He was seeking comfort and understanding and begging the Lord to help him, to help our children and family, and to help me."[797]

B) FAMILY IN SPIRIT WORLD CAN SEE FAMILY ON EARTH

i) Harriet Beal – Mother told her She said, 'Tell Father if he does not stop using tobacco he can never come where I am.[798] [me - She has a full conversation with her mother who appears to live a physical type of existence in the Spirit World and who is aware of what happens on Earth.]

ii) Dale Mouritsen says [799]: "One sister who visited the Spirit World and was recalled to mortality by President Lorenzo Snow had personal experience with what the Prophet taught: "Some inquired about their friends and relatives on the Earth. Among the number was my cousin. He asked me how the folks were getting along and said it grieved him to hear that some of the boys were using tobacco, liquor and many things that were injurious to them." [800]

iii) Aunt Reba Circa 1960s – "When she had the heart surgery the doctors gave her a low chance of survival. During surgery her spirit left her body, and she saw a balcony full of

[797] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 18.
[798] Harriet Beal.
[799] Mouritsen, Dale C. "The Spirit World, Our Next Home." *Ensign, January* (1977).
[800] LeRoi C. Snow, "Raised from the Dead," story of Ella Jensen, *Improvement Era,* October 1929, p. 974.

people that she had known on Earth and who had died. These people were watching her surgery and talking about her. They beckoned her to come up to the balcony and stay with them."[801]

G. RETURNING TO EARTH & BODY

(61) RETURNING

i) Rowe 2004 "Time to go" She was informed by her guide at the beginning of her Spirit World visit that her visit was temporary. I was welcomed there and could stay for a little while, but that it was not yet my time to die. [802]

ii) Fenimore A powerful energy force returned to liberate her and return her to her body on Earth. Darkness sped past and she was back in her body on the couch. 131 For a split second a rushing sensation engulfed me. The darkness sped past, and suddenly I was back in my body, lying on the couch. As I filled my lungs with air, I was suddenly reminded of physical pain; my stomach ached and my head throbbed, and I felt heavy and weak again. [803]

iii) Olsen' s reason to return was for his son. "It seemed so beyond repair, yet intuitively I knew I had to get back into it. I knew I had to return into that busted mass and be present with all the pain and grief that would go with it. I knew I was sent back to my life for a reason. I had a son still living who needed me. As I stared at that body, the realization of everything that had happened, how that battered body had come to be lying in the hospital bed, became real again. I felt I was somewhere between heaven and hell. 39 I don't know how it happened. There was no fight or struggle or even movement. It was as quick as the mere thought of it. As soon as I imagined it, I was there, back in the body. Oh, the pain, both physical and emotional now It was

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[801] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10. 'Spirit World Story spirit Leaves Body.' By Dianne Sellers Fort Bridger WY 1984.Dianne born 1944. Active LDS. Her mother is Dianne Sellers, and she told her this story. Aunt Reba is my father's aunt. She told this story to my mother. My dad and Aunt Reba's husband Uncle Harry had gone out to the car, and she told the story to my mother. Written by Gwen Sellers Utah state university 1984, daughter of Diane Sellers.

[802] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 5.

[803] Fenimore, *Beyond the Darkness,* 131.

overwhelming, the heaviness and denseness of it. The pain was excruciating. I wanted to pull every tube from my arms, mouth, and nose and scream out."[804]

iv) Freeman Christ led me by the hand back to the operating room. My body was still on the surgery table. I could hear the doctors say, "She's not breathing:' There was general chaos, and I could see the people below me with defibrillator paddles poised, getting ready to shock me back to life. Remember I will always be with *you:'* The resonance of Christ's compassionate voice echoed in my soul as he kissed me on my cheek. In an instant, I was back inside my body, where the operating room staff appeared to be moving in fast motion. I gasped, drawing in the breath of life.[805]

Mendenhall "Then Jesus took me back to my body." "I laid down on my body and I was in."[806]

(62) BEING SENT BACK CHOICE AGENCY/THE COUNCIL

i) Marriner Wood Merrill mid-19th century " At his option he could re-enter his body or remain in spirit. His reflection upon his responsibility to his family and his great desire to live caused him to choose to enter his body again and live. As he did so, he regained consciousness and experienced severe pains incident to the injuries which he had suffered from the accident."[807]

ii) Jacob Hamblin 1859 - "I saw my father there but separated from me. I wished him to let me into his compartment, but he replied that it was not time for me to come to him."[808]

iii) Eliza Ursenbach was told to return to life and rear her two children.[809]

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[804] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 38-39.
[805] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 136-137.
[806] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 55.
[807] Marriner Wood Merrill.
[808] Jacob Hamblin.
[809] Lundahl, *Social Positions in the City of Light,* 231–38, 234.

iv) One lady had to bargain with an angel for her return! “A stake president’s wife had died on the operating table. An angel told her that she had been called to do a great work in heaven, but she’d be allowed to look after her husband and children on Earth. She told the angel she wanted to return to care for them. She was refused but pleaded to return. She promised she’d work on genealogy. She was allowed to return.”[810]

v) Harriet Ovard Lee 1860 "[He said] 'You have done well so far; you have got to return back to the Earth to complete the course marked out for you, for you have got a great deal of work yet to do.[811]

vi) When **Alpheus Cutler** 1881 was told he had to return to mortality, he said,

"I begged to remain but was informed that I must return and warn the people to repent, as my work on Earth was not yet done."[812]

vii) David P. Kimball 1881 his father told him that if he returned, he could choose for how long, **“**Father finally told me I could remain two years, and to do all the good I could during that time, after which he would come for me; he mentioned four others that he would come for also, though he did not say it would be at the same time." “Two years later, almost to the very day he had nearly died in the desert, David P. Kimball passed away.” This is also an instance of verification because a prophecy came true.[813]

viii) Jennie Schnakenberg 1896 “I heard a voice say, 'It is my will that you live,'" and he explained that she had not yet finished her mission.”[814]

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[810] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6, Folder 9. Recounted by Susan Emberly, 1962.

[811] Harriet Ovard Lee.

[812] Alpheus Cutler.

[813] David P. Kimball.

[814] Jennie Schnakenberg.

ix) Peter E. Johnson 1898. "Just how my spirit entered the body I cannot tell, but I saw the apostle place his hands upon the head of my prostrate body, and almost instantly I realized that the change had come and I was again in the body. The first thing that I knew, I felt a warm life-giving spot on the crown of my head, which passed through my entire body, going out to the tips of my fingers and toes. I then heard distinctly the same words that had been pronounced by Elder Grant when I was set apart for my mission: 'Go in peace and return in safety.' "After entering the body I saw no more of the messengers who had been accompanying me, but I had a vivid recollection of all that had taken place."[815]

x) Loisie M. Goates. **1890** They were so busy and happy I wanted to stay but could not and had to return."[816]

xi) Hannah Adeline Savage 1900 "I was extreamly [sic] happy while in the Spirit World and asked my guide that I might remain but my guide told me my family and friends were praying for my return and I must come back that I should have to make struggles in order for life to come back in to the body." [817]

xii) Archie J. Graham 1918 "My guide continued with the kindness of a loving father. 'The Lord, our Master, has given me charge concerning you, that you may choose for yourself, after knowing the things that are in store for you over there. You may come and enjoy these things in the Spirit World, or you may remain upon the Earth.' ... He said no more but waited for my answer." Archie thought about his ancestors and how they had asked him to go back."[818]

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[815] Peter E. Johnson.
[816] Loisie M. Goates.
[817] Hannah Adeline Savage.
[818] Archie J. Graham.

xiii) Herman Stulz 1921 He heard a voice tell him "Go back and finish the work that you promised you would do before your spirit left here."[819]

xiv) J. R. Williams before 1953? A spirit told him "Brother Williams, your prayers and the prayers of your family and brethren have come up to us; and we have just been discussing them, and we've decided to let you go back for a season. ' "My messenger took me by the hand and brought me back. When I came to, I was told that my body had lain out on the porch with a cloth over my face three days and nights."[820]

xv) Tooley 1972 - Taken to The Council Chambers. Decision to stay or return. The council meets to decide since author's body is still being kept alive on life support. He remembers the sacred promises he made to marry his wife in the Temple. HE remembers his kids. HE wants to return [remember s family on Earth] He has a choice. 1088 He enters the council chambers and sees a large table and 12 men. Bookshelves (me time before computers and big screen color TV] He says it reminded him of church councils. [821] He told them he is in the Spirit World by mistake, because of an accident. He asks them to reconsider and send him back. It is not his time to die. He is told most recently deceased there by mistake do not get as far as this council (me – idea of afterlife having different levels) AND Council tells him he can return - he meets the council in a stadium [822]

xvi) Eddie Return: After a sort of life review with the council she was told that she should return to complete her work - she did not want to return. Reluctantly she agreed and was shown her mission. She asked that as soon as her mission was completed, she returns. – says

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[819] Herman Stulz, 1921.
[820] J. R. Williams.
[821] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1062,1088.
[822] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1011,1623,1656.

farewell - thousands of angels surrounded her to give her support. They began to sing. - return She returns to the hospital room. “I stood in the air and looked down at it (her body) and was filled with revulsion.” Her spirit slipped back into the body. She says the weight and coldness of the body was abhorrent. The three guides reappeared to comfort her. **Eadie** met a council of 12 men who made the decision about her return, they persuaded her to return, and she agreed after hesitation. [823]

xvii) Menet She is greeted by an angelic woman who is a relative. With her came the knowledge that it was not Sarah’s time to die. “No righteous person in this world dies before their tie.” She was told that she had to go back and could not stay here. It is her grandmother [824] Sarah did not want to go back/

xviii) Drummond said that he didn’t want to go back but he wasn’t offered a choice but went straight from his life review back to his body.” The next thing I knew, I was in my body, lying on the table as they wheeled me out of the operating room. Quite unlike feeling no pain when I left my body, upon returning, there was a great deal of pain. Laying on my chest was a death certificate, a document stating they had officially declared me dead for a duration of twenty minutes.”[825]

xix) complete. What changed her mind was meeting her unborn son who asked her to return so that he could be born. He cried for this chance. He was indeed born a few years later.[826]

xx) Olsen was told by his dead wife “I looked at her. I could feel everything… You can’t stay here…"You have to go back. You can't be here." "You have to go!" "[827]

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[823] Eadie, *Embraced by the Light,* 117,118,120,123,124,117.
[824] Menet, *There Is No Death,* 128.
[825] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me About Living*, Ch.6.
[826] Wallace, *The Burning Within,* 115.
[827] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 32.

xxi) Richardson - "word was delivered by a female messenger that I was to go back." He understood he would soon return.[828] 86 Lance said he heard the voices of his Earthly family and wished to return to them.

xxii) b) **Mistake– Mr. Whiting 19th century** – "A man had asked him his name, checked a list, and told him a mistake had been made. He apologized… He felt the pain of his injury. He yearned for the lovely place he had glimpsed so briefly." [829]

xxiii) c) **returning temporarily to deliver a message - 1840 John Boice's wife** died from the cold and travel and was laid out. She woke up to deliver a message. Before she died, she had asked non-Mormon family to care for their children, but having seen the Spirit World she changed her mind. She said one child would go with her and two stay on Earth with him. "She had been in the Spirit World but got permission to return and remain for two more hours. "I have come to rectify my mistake in willing away my children. You may keep two of them. The other will go with me. I made a mistake in growing weary of the gospel. The gospel is true, Joseph Smith is a prophet of the living God.: She remained another two hours, more testimony to the gospel, praised God for the beauties she had seen in the Spirit World and for the joy of being able to return. She instructed them to proceed with her funeral She bade her husband lay her down again and her spirit left her body. The next day she was buried and that evening her little son Thomas also died after a sudden illness."[830]

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[828] Richardson, *The Message*, 77, 86.

[829] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. P. 4 'A Mistake had been made. Tale Rising from the Dead.' Dec 1967 Riverside CA. Collector Mark Molen. Informant Nadine Adams. Story from her father who was told the story by his grandfather from the 19th century.

[830] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. p.3-4. A Visit to the Spirit World Tale Rising from the dead dec 1967 Riverside CA Collector Maek Molen. Informant Mrs. Eleanor Boice McCarroll who got the story from her father. This is the story of John Boirce, her grandfather. The story passed down through the family.

xxiv) Call The guide now told her it was time to go back. She said she didn't want to go back and did not think it was possible." Her guide told her to reach out and touch the planet (Earth) and she felt the energy, like electricity and a pulling sensation. "I saw a spinning vortex and then I felt that my guide and I were one. I reached into the vortex and willed to go forward. The vortex grabbed me and pulled in back. "I found myself in my bedroom and I couldn't feel a connection to my physical body, and I was trying to get back into it. I saw my husband asleep. I panicked. My guide told me to go in through the throat. I saw my husband stir and a sound came out of my mouth. My husband shook me – flips the light on – shakes me and my body…I felt a pop… I started breathing again and got back inside my body." [831]

xxv) Moe wants to stay but she is told by her father-in-law guide that she must return to take care of her husband.[832]

(63) CHOICE TO RETURN TO THE BODY AGENCY

i) Phoebe Carter Woodruff 2 personages gave her a choice to return which she chose. [833] At the moment that decision was made the power of faith rested upon me, and when I administered unto her, her spirit entered her tabernacle. …" [834]

ii) Peter E. Johnson - After we had spent some little time in conversation, the guide came to me with a message that I was wanted by some of the apostles who had lived on the Earth in this dispensation. As soon as I came into their presence, I was asked if I desired to remain there. This seemed strange, for it had never occurred to me that we would have any choice there in the Spirit World, as to whether we should remain or return to Earth life. I was asked if I felt

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[831] Call, YouTube.
[832] Moe *Visions of Heaven,* 9.
[833] Wilford Woodruff in 'Leaves from my Journal" 55.
[834] *Leaves From My Journal,* 4th ed., The Deseret News, 1909, 59–60.

satisfied with conditions there. I informed them that I was, and that I had no desire to return to the fever and misery from which I had been suffering while in the body. After some little conversation, this question was repeated, and I still gave the same answer. Then I asked, "If I remain here what will I be asked to do?" I was informed that l would preach the Gospel to the spirits there just as I had been preaching it to the people here; and that I would do so under the immediate direction of the Prophet Joseph… We will now show you what will take place if you remain here in the Spirit World; after which you can decide." [835]

iii) Thos. S. Thomas "I found my mortal body in a condition to reenter." [836]

iv) 19th century Ammon Oyler "He was able to see his wife crying over his body and was given the choice to staying or going back to comfort his wife and live for another 6 months. He felt sorry for his wife and decided to go back." [837]

v) Preale 1915 – "kept saying she had the privilege to go or to stay."[838]

vi) 1924 Edna Coray Dyer "was arrested by a voice to her right…." Do you want to go?" She decided to return to her body after seeing her despairing father and the choir that would sing without her on Earth. She chose to continue her Earthly work. She recovered.[839]

vii) Aunt Reba Circa 1960s –As the surgery progressed, she had to decide whether to go up on the balcony with these people or stay on Earth. She made the choice to stay and raise Jim.

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[835] Peter E. Johnson, Mission Unfinished.

[836] Thomas, *Glimpse of the Future*, 146.

[837] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. p.5 A Glimpse of Paradise. Collected Dec 1967 Upland CA by Rex W. Allred. Informant Mrs. Alice H. Allred, a senior in her 70s who heard the story at age 18 about her great-grandfather Ammon Oyler from the 19th century.

[838] BYU Provo Special Collections. Box 6 folder 7. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA02 Box 6 3 1197 232570702. FA 01-355. Copy letter from the Book of Remembrance of Larry Jardine, BYU student at Provo. 1915 written by Larry's Gt Grandparents to his Grandparents. Clarkson May 4th .

[839] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. A Visit Beyond Dec 1966. p 2. Informant Mrs. Jennie Noel Weeks.

The doctor told her when she woke up that they had difficulty with her heart during the operation and had thought she would die in the operation.[840]

viii) 2001 "**A co-worker** of the collector Travis in Orem UT. She, Cassie, told me the story of a man in her ward who'd had a serious car accident. Man experienced going to heaven. He saw a shining white light as he stood before his own judgement bar surrounded by a myriad of heavenly creatures. He got to make decisions of whether to stay or return to Earth."[841]

ix) Durham is given the choice to return. 'I knew that the choice· of whether or not to return was in reality mine'[842]

x) Rives "I knew I had no choice but to return. Resolute, I consented, "I will go back." The instant I agreed, I was propelled forward,"[843]

xi) Freeman - She exercised agency throughout her experience, from her first refusal, even to Christ, to leave her body and children behind, to her decision to return to her mission of motherhood.[844]

xii) Mendenhall "Jesus said '"You have the choice to stay here and go back" and I told him "I want to stay here."'[845] He showed me what would happen if I went back to mortality. I saw my mission and how I could serve people." She agrees in the end: "I'll go back" [846]

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[840] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10. 'Spirit World Story spirit Leaves Body.' By Dianne Sellers Fort Bridger WY 1984.Dianne born 1944. Active LDS. Her mother is Dianne Sellers, and she told her this story. Aunt Reba is my father's aunt. She told this story to my mother. My dad and Aunt Reba's husband Uncle Harry had gone out to the car, and she told the story to my mother. Written by Gwen Sellers Utah state university 1984, daughter of Diane Sellers.

[841] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 12. Recounted by Travis Grauser, BYU.

[842] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 85.

[843] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 142.

[844] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 59.

[845] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 54.

[846] Mendenhall, *In His Arms*, 54-55.

xiii) R. Jensen had choice to go with his guides at the beginning of the VTE and choice to return… "I didn't know who they were, but I knew they had come for me. I asked my heavenly visitors if there was any way I could stay on Earth with my family. Though conveying I would rather remain here, I agreed to go with them-if it were Godt will. My visitors gave me the option to stay with them or to return to Earth. I chose to go back to mortality."[847] "He chose to return to mortality he says, despite the pain in his body, He loves his wife and family. And wanted to help them through their challenges."[848] Permission is a theme, even though there is agency to return. R. Jensen's relatives asked him why he chose to visit them in the Spirit World even though he had permission to stay on Earth.[849]

xiv) Pedersen 2004 "The final barrier to my return from the Spirit World was removed by the power of a blessing administered to me by a prominent Clergyman, a man that possessed the power to perform such a miracle. At the end of my Out of Body Experience he laid hands on my head at least twice during the course of an hour. I watched from the corner of my hospital room as he patiently and lovingly coaxed my spirit back into my body. The spiritual strength of his blessing was instrumental in helping me gather the courage I needed to cross back through the Veil of death."[850] ""When Jesus appeared at my bedside, He laid His hands on my head and pronounced a healing blessing upon me." Soon after he recovered from this episode."[851] In another trip he needed a blessing to return to his body. ""Heavenly Father;" I cried out, "I've seen enough of this world Please help me find my way back to my body… I remember walking toward the light at the far end of the tunnel. Upon exiting the tunnel of light I found myself

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[847] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 6.
[848] Jensen, *Taught by Christ*, *Taught by Christ*,10,11.
[849] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 17.
[850] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife* 5.
[851] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 22.

standing above my body in the Care Unit. …the younger man said a prayer for my welfare. Next the senior man laid his hands on my head and blessed me. After he had finished the blessing the second man typed the words of the blessing into his Cell phone. As the senior man blessed me I watched a bright band of spiritual energy moving from his hands into my body. I don't recall any of the words of the blessing but as he spoke the light from his hands spread throughout my body… I froze after the blessing was finished but I realized that I was at the point of no return. Even though I had made the choice to return to my body."[852]

xv) Wren - "I felt I was asked in my mind, 'do you want to stay or return' He thought of his family and as soon as he remembered them, he returned to the table."[853]

(64) RETURN PARTY OR GOODBYE CEREMONY

Some experience a *going home* party when they first arrive in Spirit World, others such as Freeman experienced a going back to Earth party. She danced with Jesus and "There was a big feast with tables as laden as a medieval banquet.'"[854]

i) Mendenhall "Then many people came to the field, missions of them – all her relatives, her dead sister and aunt and prophets. Her primary teacher was there. They all gave her a rose and a hug. She hugs Heavenly Father and Jesus"[855]

(65) RELUCTANCE TO RETURN

i) Lorenzo Dow Young "I could distinctly see the world from which we started, but at a vast distance below us. It looked cloudy and dark. I was filled with sadness, I might say horror, at the idea of returning there, for at first, I had hoped to stay in that heavenly place I had so long

[852] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 131.
[853] Wren Round Trip Death Podcast by Eric Bennet on Spotify.
[854] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 133-134.
[855] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 55.

desired to see. Up to this time the thought had not occurred to me that I should be required to return. I pleaded with my guide to let me remain. He replied that I must return and take my body, for I was only permitted to visit these heavenly cities before I had filled my mission in yonder world. He promised me if I was faithful to the grace of God which would be imparted to me, if I would bear a faithful testimony to the inhabitants of the Earth of a sacrificed and risen Savior and of His atonement for man, in a little time I should be permitted to return and remain. We returned to my house where I found my body, apparently dressed for burial. With great reluctance I took possession of it to resume the avocations of life and endeavor to fill the mission I had received. I awoke and found myself in bed, where I lay and meditated the remainder of the night on what had been shown me."[856]

ii) Ella Jensen 1891– "I told the people I was going back to Earth, but they seemed to want me to stay with them. I obeyed the call, though it was very much against my desire, as such perfect peace and happiness prevailed there, no suffering, no sorrow. I was so taken up with all I saw and heard, I did hate to leave that beautiful place."[857]

iii) Mitchell Dalton 1895 "He opened his eyes and said, 'Oh, Papa and Mama, why did you call me back… Then he would say to his Papa, 'Won't you let me go back."[858]

iv) Stanley C. Parker reported a friend's VTE Circa 1966 "He said it was a very peaceful, serene place and he felt he would like to stay there. He said that it's a place he is

[856] Lorenzo Dow Young.
[857] Ella Jensen.
[858] Mitchell Dalton.

looking forward to being in again. He was quite sad when they revived him, and he could feel his spirit going back into his body. He said no one needs to be afraid of going there."[859]

v) Before 1967 Mr. Wilkins from Spanish Fork – "Then he looked down and saw his body on the floor in his store, and he felt his spirit re-enter the body. He fought reentering his body because he wanted to stay with the beautiful people under the tree."[860]

vi) 1980 hospital story "Mayda, a nurse, worked in Bannock Memorial Hospital, Pocatello Idaho. She now works in Utah Valley Hospital ICU. A fellow nurse, a staunch Roman catholic, told her story. This happened before Dr. Moody wrote his book Life After Life. "We coded this lady and successfully resuscitated her. She woke up and she was mad as hell. She said where she had been was beautiful and she didn't want to come back."[861]

vii) 1977 Sellesa Hurd Snarr "I wanted to play with them some more and I wanted to stay, and then all of a sudden someone came to me, and I think it was my great-grandmother and she said "It's not your time right now. You need to go be with your mother, and I didn't want to leave. I said," No, I don't want to leave, I don't want to leave." And they said "Yes, you have to, you have to go back."[862]

viii) Rives "Not only did I not want to go back to my body, but also in all actuality, even if I had wanted to, I did not know how to return."[863]

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[859] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10.p.10. To heaven and Back Collected by Louise M Parker SLC UT 1974. Reported by Stanley C. Parker. VTE circa 1966.

[860] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 9. P. 6 The Robber Tale retuning from the dead Dec 1967 Riverside CA. Collector Mark Molen. Informant Mrs. Nadine Adams Norma Wilkins, her aunt, told her this story about Norma's father-in-law Mr. Wilkins.

[861] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 11. Recounted by Mayda Thompson RN Provo UT 1980.

[862] Sellesa Hurd Snarr. Idaho LDS age 46. Written in 2016 by the collector, Jody Hansen, who is a BYU student is in her ward. Link: https://lib.byu.edu/search/byu/record/cdm.folklore.278?holding=3n6rslxlozi5aqe7. https://contentdm.lib.byu.edu/digital/collection/folklore/id/278.

[863] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,*140.

(66) POWER OF PRAYER AND PRIESTHOOD BLESSINGS TO CALL BACK THE DEAD TO LIFE

i) Wayman – "In that moment I did not want to go back," [864]

ii) Phoebe Carter Woodruff (1807-1885) recounted by Wilford Woodruff, she died, he rebuked the power of death, and her spirit returned to her body." [865] He prayed and used sacred oil and commanded her spirit to return.

iii) Harriet Ovard Lee 1860 doctors who were present pronounced me dead… all of these brethren, including my husband, formed themselves into a circle and they prayed earnestly for my recovery .... They remained shut up in my room fasting and praying (not even taking a drink of water) and administering to me for forty-eight hours." …my body was cold and stiff… my coffin was brought into the room,[After Elder Paxman prayed] "At that instant I lifted up my right arm and in a few seconds my eyelids began to twitch and a faint flow came to my cheeks. "Elder Paxman, continuing, said, 'Harriet, arise,' and I arose straight up in the bed, opening my eyes and looking around me in wonderment ...." [866]

iv) Eliza Ursenbach died in **1872** Her mother pressed two men to call her back with a blessing, even though it seemed too late. She opened her eyes and complainingly lisped: 'Why did you bring me back?' [not wanting to return] She is told 'The Priesthood is so powerfully

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[864] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love*, 360.

[865] Wilford Woodruff in 'Leaves from my Journal" p. 53-55.

[866] Harriet Ovard Lee 1860 doctors who were present pronounced me dead… all of these brethren, including my husband, formed themselves into a circle and they prayed earnestly for my recovery .... They remained shut up in my room fasting and praying (not even taking a drink of water) and administering to me for forty-eight hours." …my body was cold and stiff… my coffin was brought into the room…[After Elder Paxman prayed] "At that instant I lifted up my right arm and in a few seconds my eyelids began to twitch and a faint flow came to my cheeks. "Elder Paxman, continuing, said, 'Harriet, arise,' and I arose straight up in the bed, opening my eyes and looking around me in wonderment ....

exercised in supplication for your return, that heaven has granted that you return to your body to rear our children.'[867]

v) Marba Peck Hale's grandmother Mrs. Van Holden Peck 1878 "Sometime after she married in 1878, her grandmother was sick from diphtheria and grandfather said her heart and breathing stopped. He testified she was dead for a while. Her grandfather, Everett Van Holden Peck, gave her a blessing and she was called back from the dead."[868]

vi) Brigham Smoot 1889 "the missionaries carried Elder Smoot into a house and, laying his body on a table, dressed him in dean garments and a dean shirt and pants. The natives watched as Brigham was anointed. After sealing the blessing, Elder Wood said, "I felt his eyes move under my hands, and he awoke and came to, and asked us to place him up on the table and he would tell us what he saw,"[869]

vii) Ella Jensen 1891 – hear the command of President Lorenzo Snow to return as he stood by her 'dead' body." He said: 'Sister Ella, you must come back, as your mission is not yet finished here on Earth."[870]

viii) Jacob Hamlin - I came to my senses about 8 o click in the evening and threw off my stomach quite a quantity of blood. I requested the brethren who were standing around to administer to me, and they did so from the time I fell from the trees until then was lost to me, so far as Earthly matters were concerned.[871]

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[867] Eliza Ursenbach,

[868] Hale, Marba Peck 1928- *Marba P. Hale Papers.* Manuscript. MS 21208 (1000010223535) Folder 6 My Grandmother Peck's experience of Dying. VTE in 1878. Written 1985 by Marba Peck Hale, grandmother Van Holden Peck. Church History Library.

[869] Brigham Smoot.

[870] Ella Jensen.

[871] Jacob Hamlin.

ix) Elizabeth late 19th century "When Lorenzo Snow was president (1898-1901), and it was General Conference, my grandmother Elizabeth, then 13 years old, made a trip to Salt Lake for the conference. She got very sick and died. Someone sent a message to President Snow, and he came to the home where his grandmother was. "He went into the room where her boy was lying and laid his hands on her head commanding her to come back to life. He said her mission was not yet completed. She revived, got well and lived until she was 83 years old and had many children. She said when her spirit left its body, she no longer could feel the pain anymore. She was met by two people whom she knew, and they began walking with her. She said there was no pain and that she had forgotten almost everything she had been experiencing right before she died. Then one of the people told her she had been called back and that she must go back to her body. She said she didn't want to but did anyway. She said it was painful to reenter her body."[872]

x) 19th century Mr. Whiting had been kicked by a horse and appeared to be dead. The informant's father reported that that he and another man bless the dead man. Shortly after his blessing Mr. Whiting sat up revived.[873]

xi) Flora Ann Mayer [874]c. 1900 She stopped breathing, and her heart stopped. They knew she was dead. Grandpa gave her a blessing and called her back from the dead.

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[872] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10. p.11**.** Personal legend family story 'grandmother brought to life'. Winston, Brigham City UT 1973. Collected by Informant Aubery Guynn Provo UT 1977 Winston is married to one of Aubery's third cousins. Before leaving to teach on her mission she stayed with them. Winston is in his 50s now. He told her this story which he believes to be true.

[873] A Mistake had been made. Tale Rising from the Dead. Dec 1967 Riverside CA. Collector Mark Molen. Informant Nadine Adams. Story from her father who was told the story by his grandfather from the 19th century.

[874] Flora Ann Mayer.

xii) 1932 When Alvin Giles drank consecrated (blessed) oil he recovered from surgery… Dr Cromwell said a higher power is responsible for his getting better. [875]

xiii) 1954 Mrs. Anna Smith was returned to life through prayer." After prayer was offered, she awoke." [from a coma][876]

xiv) Mother of Professor Hudson before 1967 – her husband "called the bishop when he saw what she had done, for she still had the empty bottle from pills in her hand. The bishop came over and administered to her commanding her to return to her body and she obeyed. She returned. The doctor said she should not have lived taking all those pills at once."[877]

xv) Before 1970 "A girl in her St Louis ward was run over by a car when she was seven years old. She was taken to hospital and declared dead. Her father and other men with the Priesthood arrived, administered to her and she revived. "She said she had 'dreamed' of a beautiful green land with people dressed in shining white coming forward to welcome her. One of the people was her grandfather who had died not too long before that. Then she told them she wouldn't be able to stay but would have to go back."[878]

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[875] BYU Provo Special Collections. FA 02, Box 6, folder 7, Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. *Passing through the Veil.* Verl L Giles whose father Leland Ray Giles from Arco Idaho told him from memory.

[876] BYU Provo Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends, FA 02, folder 7, box 6. Anna Eileen Sofenson Smith by James C. Garrick – related to him by Deanna Smith Sudweeks, daughter of Anna Smith.

[877] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural And Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10. p.5.His Time had not yet come 5. Collector Marvin A Stucki May 1971. The son of the man in this story told John Voelkel who told it to me March 1971.

[878] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02, Box 6, Folder 10. p. 7. 'Dead Girl returns to life. 'By Marianne Reamy St. Louis Missouri 1970-71 and a 20 yr. old student at BYU.

xvi) Senora Rodriguez told Liz Bennich that in **1981 "**in the hospital she passed out and saw a green field with white houses… her grandmother and others. She felt a peaceful calm."[879]

xvii) Wallace "Uncle Ivan is an Elder in his church and had wanted to give me a priesthood blessing to help me recover. He laid his hands on my head and felt impressed to command me, in the name of Jesus Christ, to be healed and live. The moment he did so my body literally jumped several inches off the bed." [880]

xviii) R. Jensen was revived and brought back to his body after a heart attack at home after his neighbor Brother Spencer gave him a blessing in 2004 "I remembered it all with vivid clarity. As my head fell back and my body relaxed...all the pain left me…"By now I was floating near the top corner of the room by the bathroom door, and I watched Spencer as he pulled my body close enough to him so he could place his right hand on my head." He commanded:" "Brother Jensen, by the power of the Melchizedek Priesthood, and in the name of Jesus Christ, I command you to return!... Once he had spoken the mind and will of the Lord, I was commanded by my visitors to return to my Earthly body." [881]

(67) EXPERIENCE OF RETURNING TO BODY

i) Heroine Randall 1830 her guide "then conducted her to Earth again. She entered the room where her body was lying, and her spirit entered into it. Then her astonished

friends saw her move, and her eyes open, and she spoke and said that they

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[879] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10. Senora Rodriguez Santa Fe Argentina 1982 A Catholic 'Spirit World Did I Die?' Narrator, Liz Bennich of Logan UT.

[880] Wallace, *The Burning Within,* 119.

[881] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 5,7.

should not weep, for she would get well and remain with them."[882]

ii) Joseph Eldridge, great grandfather of Inez Robinson Preece (Smith) 1833 "Then I seemed to become unconscious and when I regained consciousness I was lying in bed." The journal also says that two hours after he died his body was being prepared for burial and he was discovered to still be alive.[883]

iii) Martha Jane Boice 1840 "He went to the couch where his wife lay and raised her up. She sat up on the board bed and said, 'Don't be afraid. I have been in the Spirit World but have obtained permission to return and to remain for two hours. I have come to rectify my mistake in willing away my children. You may keep two of them, the other will go with me. I made a mistake in growing weary of the Gospel. The Gospel is true… Then she bade her husband to lay her down again. This he did, and then her spirit took its flight again. She was buried the following day and her little son, Thomas was called away that same evening after a brief and sudden illness"[884]

iv) Harriet Salvina Beal 1852 was accompanied by her mother during her return and instructed to hold her breath. "Well, you must go now."[885]

v) Grandmother of Annette Pack 1895 "I said "Heavenly Father, If it be Thy Will I will return to mortality." Almost immediately my entire body began to prickle and hurt terribly – much the same as when circulation is stopped in a part of the body, like a foot, and we say it has gone to sleep, then when circulation starts again there is that painful prickling – this same

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[882] Heroine Randall.

[883] Submitted by Inez Robinson Smith. Written in 1947. *Life Sketch.* Call # MS 10812 (1000050000202) Manuscript on Microfilm) MS 10812 Joseph Eldridge, born in 1825, great grandfather of Inez Robinson Preece (Smith) who inherited his life story in his journal dated 1937. Church History Library.

[884] Martha Jane Boice.

[885] Peterson, Cora Anna Beal, 1880-1952 Biography of William Beal, 7-10,https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/326cad1e-be72-4dd1-9b68-f025db909248/0/14.

prickling and painful sensation engulfed my whole beings. The coming back was much worse than the going; but I speedily returned to health…. The doctors said it was a miracle that my spirit left my body."[886]

vi) Peter E. Johnson – "Just how my spirit entered the body, I cannot tell, but I saw the apostle place his hands upon the head of my prostrate body, and almost instantly I realized that the change had come and I was again in the body. The first thing that I knew, I felt a warm life-giving spot on the crown of my head, which passed through my entire body, going out to the tips of my fingers and toes."[887]

vii) May Neville 1917 returned from the Spirit World to deliver a message from her head brother and then died again.[888]

viii) 1977 Sellesa Hurd Snarr "And all of a sudden I felt my spirit going back. And I remember I looked down at my body. I was kind of floating above my body – it was on the bank there. And I remember looking down at myself and I said," that can't be me, that can't be me." And my mother was sitting there next to me, and she was giving me mouth to mouth and everything trying to get me to come back. And all of a sudden I went right back into my body and I was back. And I remember I was choking and coughing."[889]

ix) Brother Carl DeHaven 1956-57 "Somehow, he knew he couldn't go. He said his way was blocked and he was told it was not yet his time. He then underwent what he described

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[886] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 11. p.1-2.Family Legend An Encounter with Death. Informant Margaret Pack Seely Tremonton UT 1981**.** Collected by Annette Pack Logan UT 1981 Margaret is her aunt who was born in the early 1900s. This aunt helped Annette compile the life history of her grandmother. They found this story written in her grandmother's own words in her journal. This and other stories were shared in a family reunion in Tremonton. This happened when her grandmother was 19 years old.

[887] *Visit into the Spirit World*, Peter E. Johnson (From Relief Society. Magazine, Aug. 1920).

[888] May Neville.

[889] Sellesa Hurd Snarr. Idaho LDS age 46. Written in 2016 by the collector, Jody Hansen, who is a BYU student is in her ward.

as a very terrible, agonizing, painful struggle to get back into his body. He was very impressed by the pain of the struggle. Then he was conscious again."[890]

x) Durham 'There was a high pitch that rang in my ears, and a numbness throughout my body that is hard to explain. I felt extremely heavy, like I had just come out of a swimming pool after hours in the water with all my clothes on. '[891]

xi) Rowe "The next thing I knew, my spirit and my body were reconnected.

I felt a tingling sensation begin at the tips of my toes, the tips of

my fingers, and the crown of my head."[892]

(68) PAIN CEASES WHEN SPIRIT LEAVES THE BODY AND RETURNS WHEN THE SPIRIT RETURNS BACK.

i) a) Elder David B. Haight - The terrible pain and commotion of people ceased. I was now in a calm, peaceful setting; all was serene and quiet.[893]

II) B) EXPERIENCE OF RETURNING TO BODY A) PAIN B) SQUEEZING IN C) DISGUST

Speaking on December 4th 1856 **Heber C. Kimball** recorded the report of the VTE of Jedediah Grant "He said to me, Brother Heber, I have been to the Spirit World two nights in succession and of all the dreads that ever came across me, the worse was to have to return to my

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[890] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10. p.8-9. Testimony of Brother Carl DeHaven Oregon. Reported by Mrs. Wilbur E. June Wilson, Vernonia Oregon 1973. This happened around the winter of 1956-7.

[891] Durham, *Stand All Amazed,* 88

[892] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 158.

[893] The Sacrament—and the Sacrifice by Elder David B. Haight *Of the Quorum of the Twelve Apostles Oct 1989* general conference testimony shared and recorded at: By Elder David B. Haight, "The Sacrament—and the Sacrifice," October 2, 1989, https://www.churchofjesuschrist.org/study/general-conference/1989/10/the-sacrament-and-the-sacrifice?lang=eng.

body, though I had to do it."[894] (Heber C. Kimball, in Journal of Discourses, 4:135–36.) After speaking of the gardens and the beauty of everything there, brother Grant said that he felt extremely sorrowful at having to leave so beautiful a place and come back to Earth, for he looked upon his body with loathing, but was obliged to enter it again. [895]

iii) William D. Huntington told Elder Levi Curtis in 1856 that when he lived with and worked for Joseph Smith's family he was brought back from death by a blessing. "Then **Joseph Smith** came into the room with two other men. These three laid hands on him and prayed. Then William felt his spirit being drawn back into his lifeless body… the Prophet with the two brethren accompanying him washed their hands and carefully wiped them. Then they stepped to the bed and laid their hands upon the head of his body, which at that time looked loathsome to him, and as the three stretched out their hands to place them upon the head, he by some means became aware that he must go back into that body and started to do so. The process of getting in he could not remember; but when Joseph said "amen," he heard and could see and feel with his body. The feeling for a moment was most excruciating, as though his body was pierced in every part with some sharp instruments. As soon as the brethren had taken their hands from his head he raised up in bed, sitting erect, and in another moment turned his legs off the bed."[896]

iv) Jacob Hamblin in a moment I was back to this Earth. I saw the brethren carrying my body along, and it was loathsome to me in appearance.[897]

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[894] Heber C. Kimball, in *Journal of Discourses*, 4:135–36,https://emp.byui.edu/satterfieldb/quotes/Spirit%20World/Conditions%20in%20the%20Spirit%20World.html. Lundahl, Craig R, and Harold A Widdison. "The Mormon Explanation of Near-Death Experiences." *Anabiosis* June 1983, V.36, P. [97]-106 (1983).

[895] Heber C. Kimball, in Journal of Discourses, 4:135–36.

[896] Juvenile Instructor v. 27 # 12 June 15, 1892, 385-386, Juvenile Instructor : George Quayle Cannon 1827 – 1901; Deseret Sunday School Union (1872-1971) : Free Download, Borrow, and Streaming : Internet Archive.

[897] Jacob Hamblin.

v) Charles John Lambert 1886 informed them "that if I were allowed to re-enter my body, I should never be guilty of the same sin again. I was then informed that I might return to it. "In an instant-almost as quick as thought-I was at the spot where the drowning occurred and saw my body lying on the bank. It looked loathsome to me, notwithstanding I had expressed a desire to return to it…. My agony while recovering was fearful. It seemed as if the suffering of an ordinary life-time had been concentrated into a few minutes duration."[898]

vi) Ella Jensen 1891 experienced pain on her return– "terrible suffering which she experienced when the spirit again entered the body. There was practically no pain on leaving the body in death, but the intense pain was almost unbearable in coming back to life."[899]

vii) Mr. Bertrand 1892- 'Strange!' said I to myself 'There is the corpse in which I lived and which I called *me,* as if the coat were the body, as if the body were the soul! What a horrid thing is that body-deadly pale, with a yellowish blue color .... … [he was revived] I never felt a more violent irritation." When he became conscious and was able to speak, Mr. Bertrand sharply rebuked his [mountain] guide for reviving him. [not wanting to return to be revived] More than a little startled and confused, the guide replied, "You were nearly dead."[900]

viii) Earl Stowell c. 1893 'I felt myself sinking back into my room. It was painful and took quite a bit of effort to work myself back into the cold and stiff body that lay on the bed. More than a few minutes passed before I could drive the cold out of it.'[901]

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[898] Charles John Lambert.
[899] Ella Jensen.
[900] Mr. Bertrand.
[901] Earl Stowell, c.1893.

ix) Archie J. Graham 1918 .... Come, let us return to your body.' "In a flash we were in my bedroom. I saw my wife and children in their beds as I had left them. I saw my own body lying by the side of my wife .... I looked at the clock. It was just seven a.m. 'We have been gone

five whole hours as it was two o'clock when we left,' I said to my guide. "We stopped [sic] over to the bed. My body was lying on its back. It really looked to me to be dead. I said to my guide, 'It looks hard to have to go back into that cold lifeless body after seeing all I have seen.' "'It doesn't only look hard, but it is hard,' he said. 'You don't have to go back, but if you want those blessings in the flesh, you must go back.' "'Yes, yes, I do want those blessings in the flesh and I do want to go back at any cost.' I turned back to the body again to take it up. I touched it and shuddered. 'Oh,' I said, 'how can I, it's cold and clammy.' "I tried again to take it up, then cried out, 'I can't do it!' Being filled with the horror of the coldness of death, I cried out again, 'I can't do it, I can't do it."' Still, Archie knew that this was something he had to do and so with positive determination, I forced myself back into my cold, lifeless body .... I was cold and stiff and could not move .... I could not even open my mouth or move my lips or utter a word .... I began to offer a silent prayer, trusting my Heavenly Father to hear it, and He did hear it. My body began to warm up."[902]

x) Herman Stulz 1921 "And to my disappointment I was ordered to return to my lifeless body, which was very painful. ... " [903] After his spirit left his physical body, Herman Stulz described it as a torture chamber. "So this is what is called death, but I was more full of life than I was heretofore in my mortal life, why should we fear death, I was freed from all suffering,

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[902] Archie J. Graham.
[903] Herman Stulz.

death was a welcome visitor, to get my spirit out of that sick body lying on the bed which was only a torture chamber for me and I had no more use for it and I wanted to get away from it."[904]

xi) Tooley 1972 He is told if he returns there will be pain and temptations. He is told "You'll be going back to a body that's badly broken and smashed. You'll experience unbelievable pain."[905]

xii) Tom Gibson 1992 "I knew ... that I must return, and that I would still feel sick when I came back."[906]

xiii) Wallace 1995 "return - pain hit me like a train. my entire body, from head to foot, reeled in agony." [907]

xiv) Richardson 1999 Paraphrase: I was told by Randy that he would meet me when I was to leave my body again. He cautioned me about the extreme pain I would feel when I re-entered my body.[908] When he left body pain ceased and pain return when he reentered body. [909]

(69) MIRACULOUS HEALINGS. IT'S NOT YOUR TIME

i) Lovisa Mack Tuttle p. 19 She told her sister "The lord has healed me, both soul and body, raise me up and give me my clothes. I wish to get up." p. 20-21 "A short time before Lovisa as healed in the miraculous manner before stated….[910] This was only for a brief period of three years after her VTE She had consumption (TB), and she died. However, after her VTE she

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[904] Herman Stulz, *Autobiography* [ca.1971], (copy on file at the Church History Library, Salt Lake City: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 1959).

[905] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,*1121.

[906] Tom Gibson.

[907] Wallace, *The Burning Within*, 117.

[908] Richardson, *The Message*, 50.

[909] Richardson, *The Message*, 50. -- 'There was no more pain' when he first left his body.

[910] Lucy Mack Smith, *History of Joseph Smith by His Mother, Lucy Mack Smith* (Stevens & Wallis, 1945), 12–15.

had a brief recovery and used the time to preach her testimony in the meeting house and to congregations.

ii) Alpheus Cutler 1881 "I died once and was dead for some length of time. My spirit left my body and went to the land of spirits. I saw the crown that I should wear if l remained faithful, and the condemnation I should receive if l did not. I begged to remain but was informed that I must return and warn the people to repent, as my work on Earth was not yet done."[911]

iii) Frederick Babble 1920 Then this glorious personage continued: 'You must return to the Earth. Your mission in life is not yet finished. [told to return] You will lose all that you have held dear and cherished. [future life later verified and came true] However, if you will trust me, you shall yet accomplish many great things and realize some of the sweetest blessings that are available for my Father's children upon the Earth.'[912]

iii) Mary Hales 1925 "It isn't your time yet," "Finally Howard [her brother] said, 'Don't you think it's time you went back?"[913]

iv) 1934 friend of Mrs. Hurst – "I was in high school with Sarah Hillam. One girl in her mother's family died aged 18. Her sister was hysterical and asked the family to delay burial. 3 or 4 days later the girl awoke and said she had died and spoke to dead friends and relative on the other side."[914]

v) Before 1964 Gordon Rees said "**A lady died** in a hear operation – heart stopped beating. She went to heaven she saw her son who had died two years previously She was revived

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[911] Alpheus Cutler.
[912] Frederick Babble, 1920.
[913] Mary Hales.
[914] Story taken from a letter written to my mother Mrs. Lloyd B. Hurst, 49, Brigham City. Ut March 20th, 1964. During high school 30 years before [1934], her friend told her a story about returning from death.

by doctors. She said the place she had visited was beautiful. Doctors had considered her dead for five minutes. They said her recovery is a miracle."[915]

vi) Martin H. Pecks' testimony "Testimony of cases where both Martin and his sons, were healed by the blessings, anointing and laying on of hands performed by church members. Diseases or accidents caused many to die, but church elders saved many by rebuking the disease and calling upon the Lord for help. Many miracles occurred."[916]

(70) BORDER

i) Dr. Wiltse before 1892

"Dr. Wiltse says he danced in his glee. He traveled at a swift but pleasant rate of speed upward until he saw in front of him three prodigious rocks, blocking the road, when he was told that if he should pass them, he could no more return to the body. [border] He desired to go in one of the four entrances that he saw, but he was suddenly stopped. "He became unconscious again, and when he awoke, he was laying in his bed."[917]

ii) 1896- Jennie Schnakenberg - Border came in the form of a gulf. "I saw a great gulf …. I followed him (the angel) until I reached the edge of the gulf. [918]

Border of a river. **Mrs. Anna Smith 1954** saw her dead friends and relatives on her deathbed "Their hands were stretched out reaching towards her and beckoning for her to cross the river which separated them… Although mother was greatly disappointed that she could not

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[915] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6, Folder 9. Recounted by Gordon Rees who got it from Story from Faye Stevenson in 1964. She had heard from an acquaintance about the story.

[916] Hale, Marba Peck 1928- *Marba P. Hale Papers.* Manuscript. MS 21208 (1000010223535) Folder 5, Remarkable Healings. Martin H. Peck's testimony of a number of remarkable cases of healing. Church History Library.

[917] Dr. Wiltse.

[918] Jennie Schnackenberg, 1896-, *Jennie Schnakenberg Letter, Sioux City Iowa to Bureau of Information.* Salt Lake City. Manuscript on Microfilm call # MS 12663 (100005015776) Church History Library.

cross the river and remain in such a magnificent place she was deeply happy when she awoke and had her family on Earth to love and guide them unto full adult lives."[919]

iii) Bishop James A Randall recalls the testimony of **Hart Kelley 1958** "Hart Kelley pitching hay in loft, slipped, fell, got buried in hay for two hours. He recalled walking down a street that had the appearance of gold, it glittered and shone. He saw friends that had passed, he was aware of people watching him. Finally, a man who led him down this street by the arm finally spoke to him at the end of the street of gold and asked him if he wanted to go on, or return. He told the man no to carrying on, and he awake alive."[920]

iv) 1962 The uncle of one of Mary Ann McAllister's roommates reported: "I had the strangest dream just now. I stood on the shore of a great river and on the opposite bank stood my friends and relatives. I called out to them to help me cross the river. They reached out their hands, but a voice stopped them saying 'no, it's not time for you to join us. You must go back. First will come your son, your sister, and your wife." I cried out that I wished to stay but the calm commanding voice said for me to turn back. Her uncle recovered. A year later his son was killed in a tragic accident Then his siter died unexpectedly and two years later his wife died. The uncle lived several weeks after her death and then died of a heart attack quietly in his garden."[921]

REASONS TO RETURN

(71) TO DO SERVICE, BE OF HELP, SUPPORT FAMILY AND CHILDREN ON EARTH.

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[919] BYU Provo Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 folder 7 box 6. Anna Eileen Sofenson Smith by James C. Garrick – related to him by Deanna Smith Sudweeks, daughter of Anna Smith.

[920] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Recounted by Bishop James A Randall. 1961.

[921] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Recounted by Mary Ann McAllister 1962.

i) Tooley - Helping others the greatest work we can do on Earth.[922]

ii) Richardson Service is the theme of Lance Richardson's book The Message.

iii) Ryan Rampton who went to heaven and met God after being electrocuted in 2001 said he returned to serve.[923]

(72) MISSION ON EARTH – GO BACK! LIFE PLAN

i) Jacob Hamblin – asked his father why he could not enter the Spirit World fully "I then asked why I could not come. He answered 'your work is not yet done. I attempted to speak about it again, but he motioned me away with his hand, and in a moment, I was back to this Earth.' "[924]

ii) A man sat around a table with relatives discussing his daughter on Earth and it was decided he should return to take care of her. (R. Widdison, personal correspondence 1985) 234[925] Sometimes NDErs are sent back to mortal life. Authorities meet some arrivals in the afterlife and inform them that their Earthly purpose has not been completed. 234[926]

iii) Abraham A. Kimball was told about his grandfather Alpheus Cutler's VTE, although the grandfather begged him to keep it a secret while he still lived. Also sent back to complete his mission - "I died once and was dead for some length of time. My spirit left my body and went to the land of spirits. I saw the crown that I should wear if I remained faithful, and the condemnation I should receive if I did not. I begged to remain but was informed that I must return and warn the people to repent, as my work on Earth was not yet done. "After my spirit returned to my body, those around discovered the appearance of life. The first words that I spoke

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[922] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 1396.
[923] Ryan Rampton, *You Were Born A Warrior: A Near Death Experience.* Independently published. 2018.
[924] Jacob Hamblin.
[925] Lundahl, *Social Positions in the City of Light,* 231–38.
[926] Lundahl, *Social Positions in the City of Light,* 231–38.

were to Sidney Rigdon, who was stooping over me. I called upon him to repent of his sins, or he would be damned." [927]

iv) Josephine Christian Petersen Brewer Circa 1940s "She is taken ill at church and taken to the hospital. Then her dead husband appears and explains to her that it is not her time to die, because she still has work to do on Earth."[928]

v) 1954 Mrs. Anna Smith was not allowed to stay in the Spirit World or cross the river and she was told that her mission had not been fulfilled on the Earth."[929]

vi) In 1953 the branch president of a Navy ward in Key West SC Florida had almost been 'killed' in a car accident with friends. He said, according to Jerry Teea: "his spirit left his body and went to the Spirit World. There he talked to his mother who had died a few years before. Mother told him it was not time for him to die because he still had a very important mission to fulfill on Earth and he recovered."[930]

vii) Brian Glenn 1993 "He said he had a(life) plan, his parents had a plan, and everyone has a plan and must keep their promised (referring to promises and plans made before birth on Earth)"[931]

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[927] *Gems for the Young Folks. Designed for the Instruction and Encouragement Of Young Latter-day Saints.* (Salt Lake City UT. Juvenile Instructor Office.1881),17, https://archive.org/details/gems1881/page/16/mode/2up. Crowther, *Life Everlasting,* 60.

[928] Brewer, Josephine Christian Petersen 1878-1964. *Life Sketch.* Call # MS 12253. (1000050000202) Manuscript on Microfilm) p.1-8. Church History Library.

[929] BYU Provo Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends FA 02 folder 7 box 6. Anna Eileen Sofenson Smith by James C. Garrick – related to him by Deanna Smith Sudweeks, daughter of Anna Smith.

[930] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 8. Recollection of Jerry Teea who heard this at a Naval branch testimony meeting Jan 1956, Key West SC Florida.

[931] Glenn, Lloyd Gardner. 'Free The Birdies'. Manuscript on Microfilm Call # MS 15490 (100000656891) Written by Lloyd Gardner Glenn 1994 for a High Council talk delivered in Lake Forest Ward Santa Margarita CA Stake. In 1993 - His 3-year-old son Brian had been crushed beneath the garage door and rushed to Mission Hospital. Miraculously he survived with no physical or neurological deficits. Church History Library.

viii) Ricks The Savior told me that because of what I had accomplished in my first estate (pre-Earth life), I was blessed. For my mission and purpose in mortality…[932]

ix) Drummond "The goal in sharing my near-death experience after so many years is to show and teach people how to get a better life's review."[933]

x) Rives is told by the music teacher that she cannot stay in the music class. "**"Kim,** you cannot stay. You must go back. Your mission is not yet complete."[934] Then her sister's guardian angel tells her "Kim, you need to get back into your body. It is dying and your mission on Earth is not yet complete." Then her nides angel tells her ""Kim," she began, "You need to get back in your body. It is dying, and your mission on Earth is not yet complete." [935]

xi) Wayman - Clayne's mission is now to awaken and heal others, the pain hurt, and division of life needs to be healed.[936]

xii) R. Jensen emphasizes our duty and roles in the Plan of Salvation. "Because of my experience in the Spirit World, I began to comprehend more fully the importance of fulfilling our roles as fathers, mothers, sisters, brothers, and children, both in the mortal and post-mortal worlds. Any assignment that Heavenly Father has given us in either spiritual or mortal venues is important to understand and do. Although some seem small and trivial, they are not. On both sides of the Veil, there are tasks, errands, jobs, and assignments to help guide mortals, as well as a great variety of church callings. Each one is important, with plenty to do for anyone who wants to stay busy in service to others."[937] "Purpose of meeting Jesus – "This purpose, which I did not

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[932] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* 27.
[933] Drummond, *What Dying Taught Me About Living*, Ch. 6.
[934] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 106.
[935] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 136-137.
[936] Wayman, *Echoes of Resounding Love*, 357.
[937] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 19.

immediately realize, became clear to me only after my Spirit World experience was complete. I was to testify to others of the reality of our Savior, Lord, and Redeemer; of His birth, Atonement, death, and resurrection; and of the Gospel of Jesus Christ; of the truthfulness of the Holy Scriptures, and that by obeying what God has revealed in the scriptures we will be exalted."[938] "Christ has laid out a plan for us, which will bring our loved ones and us eternal lives if we are faithful."[939]

(73) APOCALYPTIC VISIONS / VIEW OF THE FUTURE

Many experiences have very political aspects at the end of their books, especially linked to ideas about the Last Day. Trials and tribulations are seen as a cleansing of sin, and there is criticism of American society which is described as having lost its moral footing. There is an underlying ethical criticism of modern times.

A) PERSONAL FUTURE

i) Harriet Ovard Lee 1860 "He told me the very year in which I should return, but neither the month nor the day." [i.e. her death date][940]

ii) Earl Stowell c. 1893 'You will have children, and will have certain assignments to fill there on Earth' [941]

iii) Alternative future seen in great detail. **Peter E. Johnson 1898** was shown the future if he died but as a bird's eye view of the Earth. He was able to observe the events surrounding his death and funeral if he chose not to return to Earth, and the anguish it would cause relatives. This seems to incorporate a bending of space and time, as well and endow him with almost

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[938] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* 20.
[939] Jensen, *Taught by Christ*, 46.
[940] Harriet Ovard Lee.
[941] Earl Stowell.

omniscient details. I was able to read the telegram (news of his death) as it ran along the wires, as easily as I could read the pages of a book. I could see President Rich when he received the telegram in Chattanooga. He saw every stage of the message of his death being composed and delivered. [942] **Peter E. Johnson 1898 "**As I was still undecided, one of the apostles said: 'We will now show you what will take place if you remain here in the spirit world; after which you can decide… I then saw the elders send a message· to President Rich, at Chattanooga, and in due time all preparations were made for the shipment of my body to Utah. [OBE} One thing seemed peculiar to me, that I was able to read the telegram as it ran along the wires, as easily as I could read the pages of a book. I could see President Rich, when he received the telegram in Chattanooga. He walked the floor, wringing his hands, with the thought in his mind: 'How can I send a message to his father? "The message was finally sent, and I could follow it on the wire. I saw the station and the telegraph operator at Price, Utah. I heard the instrument click as the message was received, and saw the operator write out the message and send it by phone from Price to Huntington. I also saw dearly the Huntington office and the man who received the message. I could see dearly and distinctly the people on the street. I did not have to hear what was said, for I was able to read their thoughts from their countenances. The message was delivered to my aunt who went out with others to find my father. "In due time he received the message. He did not seem to be overcome by the news, but began to make preparations to meet the body… By some spiritual power, all these things had been shown to me as they would occur if I did not return to· the body."[943]

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[942] Peter E. Johnson (From Relief Society. Magazine, Aug. 1920).
[943] Peter E. Johnson.

iv) May Neville 1917 on her temporary return from the Spirit World told her mother she would live until she was very old.[944]

v) Archie J. Graham 1918 is sent back and told he will be on Earth another 14 years.[945]

vi) Henry Zollinger received an electric shock from a live wire, and then received information from deceased relatives about his personal future.[946]

vii) In 1923 another man, a Mr. Monson, was ill in hospital and the bishop was praying by his side. His deceased daughter then appeared and told him about the order in which his family members would die, all before his turn. These other deaths came to pass.[947]

viii) 1932 Alvin Giles knew after his VTE that he had only a short time to live and asked his parents to take out insurance on him. "He appeared well but said he knew he would only be with his family a short time. He worked in the fields. A year later he got sick. He announced he wouldn't get better and wouldn't return from the hospital, and he waited to say goodbye to everyone in the family. Alvin died in hospital aged 16 in 1933." [948]

ix) 1954 "In about 1954, a brother was very ill and died. He saw his dead daughter in the other world. She told him to go back because it was not his turn to die. She said "Richard (her brother), grandmother, and then mother have to come first" He didn't want to go back to his

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[944] May Neville.

[945] Archie J. Graham.

[946] Lundahl, Craig R. "Otherworld Personal Future Revelations in Near-Death Experiences." *Journal of Near-Death Studies* 11, no. 3 (1993): 171–79. And (Crowther, *Life Everlasting,*111. and L. Zollinger personal communication April 11, 1992) (Henry Zollinger, *Faith-promoting Collection 1882-1974,* box 2, folder 17. (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

[947] Lundahl, *Otherworld Personal Future Revelations*, 171–79. (Crowther, *Life Everlasting,* 145-6).

[948] BYU Provo Special Collections. FA 02, Box 6, folder 7. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. *Passing through the Veil.* Verl L Giles whose father Leland Ray Giles from Arco Idaho told him from memory.

body, but he went back. In three weeks, little Richard was killed, a month later grandmother died and after 2 years Mom died."[949]

x) Susan Embry wrote in **1963** that "**A woman** who'd been sick, dead, and returned to life said she'd met relatives in the Spirit World who told her that her father would soon die. Shortly after her father died."[950] (prophetic – idea of a set lifetime span)

xi) A branch president in Los Angeles 1971 – "became very ill. In hospital when the doctor checked on him there was no heartbeat. Attempts to revive him failed. While the doctor filled out paperwork he was impressed to return to the man and found a heartbeat. The man lived and became a Patriarch. Shortly after being made a Patriarch "He told his son that he had really died that time, and he had gone to a large and beautiful room. He tried to go through a door but a man in a white robe stopped him, saying he wasn't ready yet. The person also told him he would be made a Patriarch." He told his son to take care of his mother. The next day he died of a heart attack."[951]

xii) See: The Vision of Patriarch Charles D Evans (1893) [952] He saw not only apocalyptic scenarios but also future scientific discoveries and advances in knowledge.

B) NATIONAL AND WORLD FUTURE

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[949] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6, Folder 9. Recounted by Jean Hurst 1964 from witness Kenneth Johnson, 43 Stake President of Grantsville stake UT. VTE occurred 10 years before 1964.

[950] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6, Folder 9, Recounted by Susan Embry 1962.

[951] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02 Box 6 Folder 10. p.5.His Time had not yet come 5. Collector Marvin A Stucki May 1971. The son of the man in this story told John Voelkel who told it to me March 1971.

[952] In the *Contributor Magazine*- later known as *The Improvement Era*. 1893-1894 (Volume 15) / 1894 August (No. 10), 638-641,https://catalog.churchofjesuschrist.org/assets/07689413-b353-4fbb-b882-5fa09ecd9c19/0/0.

xii) James G. Marsh 1838 "He saw bloody wars among all people accompanied with earthquakes, pestilences and famines. And he saw all the cities of the nations crumble and fall to rise no more. He saw the church of Christ ready to ascend on high, and when they were ready, Zion from above hovered in sight, accompanied by the Lord and all the holy prophets. The church on beholding them, arose triumphantly and met them in the expanse above. "These are a few of the things which he related of his vision to his parents, suffice it to say, he saw the beginning and end of all things and he never after appeared to be afraid of death." [953]

xiii) Charles D. Evans 1897 "While I lay pondering…a strong solicitude (anxiety) for my imperiled country utterly excluded every other thought…to my infinite surprise a light appeared in my rook…Although it may have been the hour of midnight…yet all was light and bright and warm as an Italian landscape at noon, but the heat was softer or more subdued… I saw descending through my bedroom roof…a personage clothed in white apparel, whose countenance was smoothly serene, his features regular, and the flashes of his eye seemed to shoot forth scintillation, to use and Earthly comparison, strongly resembling those reflected from a diamond under an intensely illuminated electric light which dazzled but did not bewilder." He is shows a vision of the future of the USA which "had reached an unparalleled prosperity, wealth abounded, new territory was acquired, commerce expanded, finance strengthened, confidence was maintained and people abroad pointed to her as the model nation- the ideal of the past realized and perfected – the embodiment of liberty…confidence is lost, wealth is arrayed against labor, labor against wealth, yet the land abounds with plenty of food and raiment and silver and gold are in abundance…great confusion in the finances of the nation. (The} policy of many

[953] Obituary, *Elders' Journal* (courtesy of the Church History Library, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints).

wealthy ones has produced distress and so produce further sorrow." …" Monuments erected to perpetuate the names of the noble and brave were ruthlessly destroyed by combustibles." "A foreign power invaded the nation which from every human indication it appears would seize the government and supplant it with monarchy. I stood trembling at the aspect when lo, a power arose in the west which declared itself in favor of the Constitution in its original form; to this suddenly rising power, every lover of constitutional rights and liberties throughout the nation gave hearty support. …The struggle was fiercely contested but the Stars and Stripes floated in the breeze and bidding defiance to all opposition waved proudly over the land…. [954]

xiv) 1896 Jennie Schnackenberg "She then saw many miles of people seated along a pathway and had apocalyptic visions."[955]

xv) Durham is famous for her grand apocalyptic visions that some have criticized as being embellishments. She foresaw a great destruction on Earth, Earth changes, floods storms and earthquakes and the destruction of coastal areas of the USA. Her visions have a political twist[956]

xvi) Menet - She has visions of the future of the Earth…wars, collapse of tall buildings falling in New York. Economic collapse, disease. People flee to one of two dozen cities of light. An earthquake breaks North America apart.[957]

xvii) Menet - I see the future She saw apocalyptic visions of war, disease pandemics, 911 attacks, breakdown of society, famine, cities of light and safety. 20 or 30 safe cities in the West

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[954] Springville UT patriarch contributor Aug 1894 no 10 vol 15 638-641,https://archive.org/details/contributor1510eng.

[955] Schnackenberg, Jennie 1896-. *Jennie Schnakenberg Letter, Sioux City Iowa to Bureau of Information.* Salt Lake City. Manuscript on Microfilm call # MS 12663 (100005015776) Church History Library.

[956] Durham, , *Stand All Amazed, Stand All Amazed,* 53-54.

[957] Menet, *There Is No Death,* 64, 73.

mostly. The light came from the prayers of those there. Nuclear missiles fired on US and invasion my Russian and Chinese armies. There are many earthquakes as the Earth cleanses herself. US cities devastated. Floods. USA split in half. Great Lakes empty into Gulf of Mexico. then a giant fireball hits the Earth.[958]

xviii) Freeman "They are deeply saddened to see the rampant wickedness in our country today.' If Americans do not start living righteously and put God back in, then the country will be taken from them:' I was told that if we do not put God back into all aspects of our life, whether it be in our own separate life or as a nation, we will not be a free nation anymore, and the heavens will weep."[959]

xix) Daybell followed a prompting to move to Rexburg Idaho, He believes it is a chosen area where there will be a City of Light during the comping tribulations.[960] Although this particular book contained only hints at apocalyptic content, his other works, and lectures were focused on this topic of preparing for the end days.

xx) Richardson He is told Zion will soon appear on Earth.[961] One of the conditions for Lance to return was to share his message about what he had learned in the Spirit World and that Jesus Christ is redeemer. Also, to share a warning that America is in moral danger and people must serve each other. Sees men in battle fatigues. Men from Revolutionary War and Civil War. This was part of making the United States as the location for Zion. He discusses politics with them.

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[958] Menet, *There Is No Death,* 67-73.
[959] Freeman, *Led by the Hand,* 103.
[960] Daybell *Living on the Edge* 175-178.
[961] Richardson, *The Message*, 91, 115,106-108

xxi) Call is shown a hologram of the future if she didn't return which helped her decide to return." The guide said, 'look to your right' and I saw a holographic picture of my Mom in the future. She is not doing well and is fragile… He said 'look to your left. I saw a daughter getting off a school bus and then the 4-year-old asks 'Mommy, who will take care of us?' Her little hand reached up and I answered, 'Of course I will.'"[962]

xxii) Rowe "As I continued to look into "The Window of Heaven," I witnessed many national events that have since taken place, as well as several that will still happen in the near future. The nation was still experiencing economic trouble and there were small-scale natural disasters, but for the most part there wasn't anything to signal major problems ahead." This is more controversial and ties her in with Chad Daybell and his apocalyptic doomsday cultish group what went far beyond typical LDS beliefs.[963]

H AFTER THE VTE

i) Hugh Nibley "[Absolute knowledge of the afterlife] gives me a great relief, so that's why I don't take this very seriously down here. We're just sort of dabbling around, playing around, being tested for our moral qualities…We can forgive, and we can repent."[964]

ii) Elder David B. Haight - I cannot begin to convey to you the deep impact that these scenes have confirmed upon my soul. I sense their eternal meaning and realize that "nothing in the entire plan of salvation compares in any way in importance with that most transcendent of all events, the atoning sacrifice of our Lord.[965]

(74) VERIFICATION/ VERIDICAL EVENT

i) Earl Stowell c. 1883 'Later in life he saw a photograph of his grandfather and realized it was the man he saw in the Spirit World. His grandfather had died in Mexico before he was

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[962] Call, YouTube.
[963] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 111.
[964] Hugh Nibley.
[965] Elder David B. Haight.

born. Family confirmed he was a short man. Earl's father had said he was tall but that was a childhood memory when he had been shorter.'[966]

ii) Charles John Lambert 1886 "While my spirit was separate from its earthly tenement I saw and understood all that took place, as afterwards verified by the parties whom I have named in connection with the drowning."[967]

iii) Thos. S. Thomas 1894 - He told his family what he seen out of body, and they confirmed these things had indeed happened 148-9 "All the things I gave were corroborated" [968]

iv) Ella Jensen 1891 saw a relative teach school. One of the children there was, she thought, still on Earth, but after she returned, she found out the child had died while Ella was ill. [969]Another woman saw children being taught in school. **Ella Jensen 1891** saw a dead child she did not know to be dead and whose parent back on Earth later confirmed it.[970] One of her dead friends was there. The friend had died so recently that she had not been told. She had not been told her friend had died for fear of upsetting her when she was sick."[971] One person Ella was puzzled about seeing in the Spirit World was little Alphie, the son of Alphonzo H. Snow. He had been in her Sunday School class in the First Ward, and she did not know that he had just died. When she told her mother, she said, "Yes, Ella, little Alphie is dead, too. He died early this morning while you were so very sick. We knew you loved him and that it would be a shock to you, so we did not tell you about his death." But, nevertheless, she had recognized the little

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[966] Earl Stowell.
[967] Charles John Lambert.
[968] Thomas, *Glimpse of the Future*, 149.
[969] Crowther, Life Everlasting.
[970] Snow, L. C. "Raised from the Dead." *Improvement Era* 32, no. 12 (1929).972-980.
[971] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Recounted by William Sheffield, BYU student 1964.

fellow happily singing among the children under the direction of Eliza R. Snow.[972] "She saw a man from town who'd gone on a fishing trip in Wyoming and had never been heard of since. He had drowned. She saw him there still in fishing clothes.[973] The people were all dressed in white or cream, excepting Uncle Hans Jensen, who had on his dark clothes and long rubber boots, the things he wore when he was drowned in the Snake River in Idaho.[974]

v) Mr. Bertrand 1892 said to the mountain guide who revied him: "Dead! I was less dead than you are now, and the proof is that I saw you going up the Titlis by the right, while you promised me to go by the left." · Wondering how Mr. Bertrand could have seen him from where he had been sitting, the guide explained why he had taken the group up Titlis on the right side. "Because the snow was soft and there was no danger of slipping." to his guide that he had died and left his body and that was how he knew the group had gone up the mountain on the right side."[975]

vi) Heber Hale, on Jan 20th, 1920, he foresaw the death of a man he knew, that would actually occur two days later, when he saw women in the Spirit World preparing to receive him. "We are preparing to receive Brother Phillip Worthington very soon." (Phillip Worthington died on January 22, 1920. President Hale was advised by telegram and returned to Boise and preached the funeral sermon on January 25, 1920.)[976]

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[972] Talking Scripture, "Ella Jensen Raised From the Dead by Lorenzo Snow," LDS Scripture Teachings, December 13, 2016, https://www.ldsscriptureteachings.org/2016/12/ella-jensen-raised-from-the-dead-by-lorenzo-snow.

[973] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 9. Recounted by William Sheffield, BYU student 1964.

[974] LDS Living, "When President Snow Called a Girl Back From the Dead: An Incredible Account of the Spirit World - LDS Living," LDS Living, August 3, 2022, https://www.ldsliving.com/when-president-snow-called-a-girl-back-from-the-dead-an-incredible-account-of-the-spirit-world/s/82410.

[975] Mr. Bertrand.

[976] A Heavenly Manifestation to Heber Q. Hale President of Boise Stake Idaho Hale, Heber Q. "Hale, Heber Q." (Jan 1920).

vii) Walter P. Monson 1923 had been told in the Spirit World that his son would die before him. His dead daughter informed him, ‘As she came towards me, she raised her right hand and said, 'Go back, papa, I want Richard first. Then grandma must come, and then mama is coming, before you.'" Four weeks after I returned home, my boy, Richard, passed away. During the last hours of his life, he sat up his bed, opened his big blue eyes and looked toward the door with intense interest. "'Come in, Elna,' he said, 'there's only papa and mama here.' "I asked him whom he could see, and he answered, 'Elna is there. It's funny you can't see her. And there are a whole lot of people with her who want me to come.'… Nineteen days from that time, mother left us. And six years from the time of mother's death, Mrs. Monson passed away.[977]

viii) Robert Aimes (1945) was able to recount what he saw out of body when all his fellow soldiers were killed, and he was badly injured. When medics found him, he was unconscious and remained so for twelve days. “He was able to report to his rescuers the exact scene found by the medics including his body and the bodies of his buddies e.g., he told medics one buddy was decapitated. He said this because some were skeptical of his out of body claims. Another body had been tossed from the shell crater and was dangling in barbed wire entanglements. Another clutched the belt buckle of a friend in his death grip. The medics verified these details of the physical scene as Robert Aimes claimed to view to form his detached spiritual position.” [978]

ix) 1950s Gerald Maas said: “I remember **the story of a stake President** who died and was permitted to return to mortality. On the other side he saw that everyone was very busy. A

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[977] Jeremiah Stokes, *Modern Miracles* (Bookcraft, 1945), 78-81.

[978] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 8 1951-1959. Robert Aimes – high school teacher – related events recorded here by Steven C. Walker in a testimony meeting of 2nd Ward Heber UT in Jan 1951. The incident occurred in 1945 in North Africa.

woman was making robes – he was told it was for his first counsellor. Upon waking up alive he was informed that his first counsellor had just died." [979]

x) W.W. Merrill Before 1953 This testimony is the closest thing to a shared death experience because both persons died, and both returned after meeting in the Spirit World. W. W. Merrill, the father of apostle Joseph F. Merrill, had an extremely unusual near-death experience. When Elder Merrill visited the Spirit World, he saw a young woman to whom he had recently given a priesthood blessing. At that time, she had expressed a desire to die so she could be with her mother, whom she desperately missed. This account was related by Apostle Rudger Clawson and written by J. Berkeley Larsen.

A young woman had asked him to bless her to die. She was alone and missed her dead parents. Brother Merrill went back to his bed, and later both he and the young lady died. They met each other in the Spirit World.

"They went over to the Other Side, and as Brother Merrill was walking down a sidewalk with some brethren, he met this young lady who said, 'This is my mother; this is one of the reasons I wanted to come.' "Well, it just so happens they both came back. They saw each other over there. They conversed together. They met other people they knew and talked to, then came back and both remembered the incidents. President Clawson said, 'That is one of the most singular instances of this type in the history of the Church.'"[980]

xi) Brother Carl DeHaven 1956-57 "When he regained consciousness, he immediately described his experience to the doctor. The doctor told him that his heart had stopped beating during the surgery and he had been dead." The doctor told him he had made an incision and

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[979] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6 Folder 8. Told by Gerald Maas 1961. Event happened in the 1950s.

[980] W.W. Merrill.

massaged his heart, which was a new technique that many doctors had not heard of. The doctor told DeHaven that the only way DeHaven could have known this was to have seen it and the doctor verified the exact procedures described to him by DeHaven, seen when he had been medically dead."[981]

xii) Durham – She remembered the face of the priest who prayed over her when she was declared dead in the morgue. She was shocked when she called out to him in the wards after her recovery. Shocked he exclaimed "You couldn't have seen me! You had already died!" [982]

xiii) Pedersen The angel who had received a birth assignment into his family as his own granddaughter became a baby born to his relatives. The angel told him this before he found out his daughter was pregnant, and she later gave birth to a daughter.[983]

xiv) Moe was able to provide details of her father-in-law to her husband, that her husband had never shared with her.

(75) GIFTS AND DREAMS/NO VEIL

i) Daybell's gifts led him to believe he was 'special' almost like a prophet**.** "He did have an after effect of the experience…he began to sense disembodied spirits and receiving direct promptings and impressions to keep him out of danger. "In retrospect I believe when I hit the water and my spirit exited my body my personal Veil was torn open near my forehead and never sealed back up properly… After high school he was less busy, and he became more aware of this torn Veil and he became aware of another realm. "Some of them were friendly spirits, while others were definitely dark souls. For some reason when they died, they didn't go back to the

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[981] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. FA 02, Box 6, Folder 10. p.8-9. Testimony of Brother Carl DeHaven Oregon. Reported by Mrs. Wilbur E. June Wilson, Vernonia Oregon 1973. This happened around the winter of 1956-7.

[982] Durham , *Stand All Amazed,* 97.

[983] Pedersen, *Near Death and the Afterlife,* 133.

light. They had stayed on Earth and now were stuck in limbo."[984] This idea of a torn Veil after a VTE is seen also in the case of Mendenhall. (this is not doctrine!) After his second VTE in 1991 his 'powers' increased: ""My personal Veil had been ripped open even wider and this time it didn't close up." "I started having déjà vu experiences along with waking visions of future events …I also began having direct intervention in my life from the other side." For example, "In the celestial room of the Temple his unborn child Emma appeared to him as a beautiful woman standing a few inches off the ground."[985] ""My torn Veil allows information to be downloaded into my brain from the other side. The scenes I am shown are real events that will happen. He has seen a coming earthquake near Orem UT. He had a vision of himself as an older man building the New Jerusalem."[986]

ii) Mendenhall had significant psychic abilities after her recovery from her childhood diabetic coma and she often refers I her book to how her 'Veil' was lifted so she could see spirits and auras around people. She claims to have the ability to read minds and also to see devils, Earthbound spirits.[987]

iii) Rives. She was able to tell her sister that she had seen her working on her thesis and answer the phone when her mother called and was able to describe everyone's clothes while her body was near death in her own bed at home.[988]

iv) Olsen After he survived, he claims to see the good in people's souls intuitively.[989] He also had a dream about his dead son, which was a VTE in that it was 'real' and lucid." There

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[984] Daybell, *Living on the Edge*, 5,56.
[985] Daybell, *Living on the Edge,* 111,112.
[986] Daybell, *Living on the Edge,* 178.
[987] Mendenhall, *In His Arms,* 59-60.
[988] Rives, *My Walk Thru Heaven,* 141.
[989] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 72-73.

lying in the crib was my son. It was little Griffin! He was alive and well. He slept so peacefully... He was alive, and I was with him, holding him in this wonderful place. It was real, even super real. I had never felt anything so intense. We were tangible. I could feel his body solidly against mine… I felt something or someone move up behind me. The feeling coming from this being was so powerful and yet so loving that it almost startled me. I felt light and love engulf me. I knew I was standing in the presence of someone so eternal and so powerful, yet so personal. I did not dare turn around to look. I stood there holding my son, taking in the intense feeling. The being behind me had so much light, so much love, and so much power. I knew I was in the presence of God. Still, I did not turn around. I stood there holding Griffin and feeling the overwhelming love of a Father standing behind me. I could feel his everlasting, unconditional love."[990]

v) Call became intuitive. "I had a feeling I had to go to church and in sacrament meeting I felt the urge to walk out into the foyer. A woman there was crying. I knew she was the reason I had felt the urge to go there. I hugged her and she told me her daughter had just been found dead in Los Angeles. I remembered the girl in my NDE and knew it was her. I asked the lady if she would talk with me the next day and to bring a photograph of the daughter. She showed up the next day with a black and white photo of her daughter and I knew it was her. I asked if she had red hair and green eyes, and her mother said yes but inquired how I knew. So, I shared meeting her in my NDE and I gave her the information I had received from the dead woman, that before she died, she sang. She said she loved singing. She had sung for me in the portal, and she had a beautiful voice. Her message was "tell them I am not in pain. I am free. I am happy." A week

[990] Olsen, *I Knew Their Hearts,* 85-86.

later this lady contacted me and told me that the coroner's report matched everything I had described."[991]

vi) Rowe "Since 2004, I have continued to have dreams about present and future circumstances,"[992]

vii) Moe continued to see ancestors in her dreams and receive messages after her VTE.[993]

(76) LOST FEAR OF DEATH EXPRESSED

i) James A Randall 1961 wrote about **Sheldon Parks in 1955**, a member of his ward, who had a heart condition in an Arizona hospital who was near death, and later had a brief recovery. Parks said: "I shall never fear death again". Randall added that Parks told him that he "awaits with anticipation and satisfaction the time when he will be permitted to re-enter and enjoy the peaceful and beautiful surroundings and environment of the world, I was permitted to gain a glimpse of. He soon passed away."[994]

(77) JOINING OR LEAVING THE CHURCH

i) Heroine Randall 1830 accepted the full faith after her VTE

ii) Frederick Babble 1920 [He became LDS because of his VTE]

iii) Herman Stulz 1921 When Herman had his second experience, he remembered promising to accept the gospel when he came to Earth and to do Temple work for his ancestors."

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[991] KMVT, "Present! - Amy Call's Near-Death Experience," September 24, 2014, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qX803D_cofI.

[992] Rowe, *A Greater Tomorrow,* 11.

[993] Moe, *Visions of Heaven,* 10.

[994] BYU Special Collections. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. Box 6, Folder 9. Recounted by James A Randall May 12, 1961. Sheldon , 1961.

Herman testified that what the LDS faith taught as doctrine was true. He had previously read the Book of Mormon and his VTE confirmed it was true for him.

iv) Tooley became active again his wife and him were sealed in the Temple and completed all their ordinances. "Sense of urgency" "not having enough time to complete things."[995]

v) Elane Durham and **Jane Moe**, led to join the church given that they found church teachings compatible with their VTEs. **Amy Call**, however, left the church. Rowe was excommunicated. There is always comings and goings and fluidity in the relationship between the church and members. Some hold Temple recommends, others don't but attend meetings in the chapels, others become inactive. Others write about their VTEs and do not highlight LDS affiliation, such as Betty Eadie.

(78) IMPRESSION OF THE SPIRIT TO SHARE VTE

i) Harriet Ovard Lee 1860' Many other things he told which he commanded me not to tell to a living soul.'[996]

ii) Eliza Ursenbach died in **1872 Told '**But let me admonish you to speak with extreme caution of things you have seen in this Spirit World.'[997]

iii) 1932 Alvin Giles was reluctant to share his experience. [998]

iv) Ricks - Ricks promoted by the spirit to write down this sacred experience in 2012. [999]

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[995] Tooley, *I Saw Heaven,* 2147.
[996] Harriet Ovard Lee.
[997] Eliza Ursenbach.
[998] BYU Provo Special Collections. FA 02 Box 6 folder 7. Collection of Supernatural and Religious Legends. *Passing through the Veil.* Verl L Giles whose father Leland Ray Giles from Arco Idaho told him from memory.
[999] Ricks, *Remember : A Little Boy's,* ix.

Some VTErs are allowed to share by the Holy Ghost and others are told to keep experiences sacred.

v) Mendenhall "The Lord showed me many more things that I can't share right now." [1000]

vi) Jensen was instructed to share on the other hand.[1001]

(79) MEMORY OF THE VTE REMAINS CLEAR, VIBRANT AND INFLUENTIAL.

i) Lorenzo Dow Young - "The memory of this dream is still clear and distinct, after the lapse of over fifty years with their many changes."[1002]

(80) CONSISTENCY OF STORIES OVER TIME

i) Brian Glenn 1993 Even though he was only three at the time of the accident "His story never changed."[1003]

[1000] Mendenhall, *In His Arms*,49.
[1001] Jensen, *Taught by Christ,* x.
[1002] Lorenzo Dow Young.
[1003] Glenn, Lloyd Gardner. 'Free The Birdies'. Manuscript on Microfilm Call # MS 15490. (100000656891). Written by Lloyd Gardner Glenn 1994 for a High Council talk delivered in Lake Forest Ward Santa Margarita CA Stake. In 1993 - His 3-year-old son Brian had been crushed beneath the garage door and rushed to Mission Hospital. Miraculously he survived with no physical or neurological deficits. Church History Library.

Appendix 5

Buddhist Sources

(i) Choice Excerpts from the Tibetan Book of the Dead.

(ii) Robert Aho – Modern Western Tibetan Buddhist Delog.

Choice Excerpts from the Tibetan Book of the Dead.[1]

Below are 33 sets of quotations taken from this translation which give clear instructions on how to navigate the Bardo to best advantage. Visions are described in this text and advice on the best choices and attitudes are provided. The deceased is addressed as "O Child of Buddha nature", giving respect, encouragement and acknowledgement to the potential each Bardo being carried to become a realized Buddha.

> i) Ignorance and delusion
> O, Alas! Alas! Fortunate Child of Buddha Nature,
> Do not be oppressed by the forces of ignorance and delusion!
> But rise up now with resolve and courage! (8)
>
> ii) The Nature of Reality in Vajrayana
> All phenomena are [ultimately] selfless, empty, and free from conceptual elaboration.
> In their dynamic they resemble an illusion, mirage, dream, or reflected image,
> A celestial city, an echo, a reflection of the moon in water, a bubble, an optical illusion, or an intangible emanation.
> You should know that all things of cyclic existence and Nirvana
> Accord [in nature] with these ten similes of illusory phenomena.
> All phenomena are naturally uncreated.

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[1] Quoted from Karma-gliṅ-pa, Padma Sambhava, and Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead [English Title]: The Great Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate States [Tibetan Title]*. Edited by Graham Coleman and Thupten Jinpa. Translated by Gyurme Dorje. Penguin Classics deluxe edition (Penguin, 2007).

They neither abide nor cease, neither come nor go.
They are without objective referent, signless, ineffable, and free from thought.
The time has come for this truth to be realised! (9)

iii) Taking Refuge in the Buddha - Dharmakaya
From within a state free from grasping and beyond intellect,
I take refuge in the nature of the great expanse of sameness and perfection,
Atemporal emptiness, free from conceptual elaboration,
Primordially pure in essence, natural expression and compassionate energy.
From within [a state which is] non-conceptual, naturally radiant and stark,
I take refuge in the primordial embodiment of the five Buddha-bodies,
Spontaneously and naturally present,
[Abiding] in the mandala of the [unique] seminal point,
Which is [the union of] expanse and awareness, and of radiance and emptiness,
The indestructible chain of inner radiance, that is intrinsic awareness.
Throughout the three times, beginningless and endless,
I take refuge in the Compassionate Ones,
Unimpeded, naturally expressive, and all-pervasive,
The unimpededly arising and subsiding rays of light,
Which emanate through the expressive power of awareness,
Dispelling, non-conceptually, the darkness in the minds of living beings. (13)

iv) Release of attachments before death.
Alas, now as the intermediate state of the time of death arises before me,
Renouncing [all] attachment, yearning and subjective apprehension in every respect,
I must undistractedly enter the path, on which the oral teachings are clearly understood,
And eject my own awareness into the uncreated expanse of space.
Immediately upon separation from this compounded body of flesh and blood,
I must know [this body] to be like a transient illusion. (33)

v) Emotions and Fear in the Bardo after death.
Alas, now as the intermediate state of reality arises before me,
Renouncing the merest sense of awe, terror or fear,

I must recognise all that arises to be awareness, manifesting
naturally of itself.
Knowing [such sounds, lights and rays] to be visionary
phenomena of the intermediate state,
At this moment, having reached this critical point,
I must not fear the assembly of Peaceful and Wrathful Deities,
which manifest naturally! (33)

vi) Karma's effects and state of mind's importance.
Alas, now as the intermediate state of rebirth arises before me,
I must with one-pointed intention concentrate my mind,
And resolutely connect with the residual potency of my
virtuous past actions.
I must obstruct the womb entrance and call to mind the
methods of reversal.
This is the time when perseverance and purity of perception
are imperative. (34)

vii) Thoughts and "self" and awareness.
The following is the introduction [to the means of experiencing] this (single) nature [of
mind]
Through the application of three considerations:
[First, recognise that] past thoughts are traceless, clear, and
empty,
[Second, recognise that] future thoughts are unproduced and
Fresh, (41)
And [third, recognise that] the present moment abides
naturally and unconstructed.
When this ordinary, momentary consciousness is examined
nakedly [and directly] by oneself,
Upon examination, it is a radiant awareness,
Which is free from the presence of an observer,
Manifestly stark and clear,
Completely empty and uncreated in all respects,
Lucid, without duality of radiance and emptiness,
Not permanent, for it is lacking inherent existence in all
respects,
Not a mere nothingness, for it is radiant and clear,
Not a single entity, for it is clearly perceptible as a multiplicity,
Yet not existing inherently as a multiplicity, for it is indivisible
and of a single savour.
This intrinsic awareness, which is not extraneously derived,
Is itself the genuine introduction to the abiding nature of [all]
things. (42)

viii) Nature of Mind

Be certain that the nature of mind is empty and without foundation.
One's own mind is insubstantial, like an empty sky.
Look at your own mind to see whether it is like that or not.
Divorced from views which constructedly determine [the nature of] emptiness,
Be certain that pristine cognition, naturally originating, is premordially radiant -
Just like the nucleus of the sun, which is itself naturally originating.
Look at your own mind to see whether it is like that or not! (44)

ix) Pure Awareness.
Be certain that this awareness, which is pristine cognition, is uninterrupted,
Like the coursing central torrent of a river which flows unceasingly.
Look at your own mind to see whether it is like that or not!
Be certain that conceptual thoughts and fleeting memories ate not strictly identifiable,
But insubstantial in their motion, like the breezes of the atmosphere.
Look at your own mind to see whether it is like that or not!

x) Appearances and Mind.
Be certain that all that appears is naturally manifest (in the mind],
Like the images in a mirror which [also] appear naturally.
Look at your own mind to see whether it is like that or not! (44)

Then, one's own mind, completely free from conceptual projections, will become luminously clear.
[This] intrinsic awareness, [union of] inner radiance and emptiness, is the Buddha-body of Reality,
[Appearing] like (the illumining effect of] a sunrise on a clear and cloudless sky, (45)

xi) The Nature of Appearances
Now, with regard to the diversity of relative appearances:
They are all perishable; not one of them is genuinely existent.
All phenomenal existence, all the things of cyclic existence and Nirvana,
Are the discernible manifestations of the unique essential nature of one's own mind.
[This is known because] whenever one's own mental

continuum undergoes change,
There will arise the discernible manifestation of an external
change.
Therefore, all things are the discernible manifestations of
mind. (53)

xii) Consciousness transference discussed (*phowa*)
O child of Buddha Nature that which is called death has now arrived.
You are leaving this world. But in this you are not alone.
This happens to everyone. Do not be attached to this life.
Even if you remain attached and clinging you do not have the power to stay-you will only continue to roam within the cycles of existence.
Therefore, do not be attached and no not cling.
Think of the Three Precious Jewels.
O Child of the Buddha Nature, however terrifying the appearances of the intermediate state of reality might be so not forget the following words.
Go forward remembering their meaning.
The crucial point is that through them recognition may be attained. (235)
O as I roam in cyclic existence driven by deep seated delusion,
may the transcendent lord Vairocana draw me forward
Leading me on the path of radiant light, which is the pristine recognition of reality's expanse…
may I be rescued from the fearsome passageway of the intermediate state and be escorted to the level of an utterly perfect Buddha. (237-8)

xiii) Instructions about that will be seen and how to respond are given to the "Child of Buddha Nature":
O Child of Buddha Nature listen without distraction.
On the second day the purity of the entire water element will arise in the form of a white light. …
A brilliant white light indicative of the mirror-like pristine cognition, which is the natural purity of the aggregate of form, white and dazzling, radiant and clear will emanate from the heart of Vajrasattva
and his concert and it will shine piercingly before you at the level of your heart with such brilliance that your eyes cannot bear it. …you will wish to turn away in fear and terror from the bright white light…
you should fearlessly recognize the white light, white and dazzling, radiant and clear, to be pristine cognition.
Have confidence in it. Be drawn to it with longing devotion.
(you should be thinking) …
This is the light ray of the transcendent Lord Vajrasattva's compassion.
I take refuge in it…. Be devoted to the white light.
(do not look at the other dull smokey light from the hell realms) (238-9)

xiv) <u>Light</u>

(It says that - As you pray and enter this light you will dissolve into the rainbow light in the heart of Lord Vajrasattva and attain Buddhahood.) (245)

xv) What arises over a series of days is described red, green lights etc.…each with an opportunity for liberation. It describes the five Buddha families and 42 deities of the Buddha bodies.
Four Light rays will come from the hearts of five Buddha families
These represent the vision of the four pristine cognitions.
A radiant white light emanates from Vairocana
Radiant blue light - Vajrasattva
Radiant yellow light like gold from Ratnasambhava
Radiant red light Amitabha (248-9)
Let the Buddha bodies and light rays merge into you and Buddhahood will be attained.
Do not be attracted to the dull lights of impure cyclic existence (249)

xvi) The meaning of Dull lights
Dull white light god realm
Dull red is jealous god realm
Dull blue is human realm
Dul green is animal realm
Dull yellow is hungry ghost realm
Dull smoky light is hell realm (249)

xvii) Example of the different appearances on different 'days' in the Bardo.
O, Child of Buddha Nature, listen without distraction.
On the seventh day, a five-faceted multicolored light, [which is indicative
of] the purity of your habitual tendencies in the expanse [of reality],
will arise before you.
Simultaneously, the divine assembly of the
awareness holders, arising from the pure realm of the sky-farers,
will come forward to escort you. When this happens: (251-2)

xviii) Recite the following aspirational prayer:
0, as I roam in cyclic existence [driven} by deep-seated
habitual tendencies,
May the divine assembly of awareness holders attend to me
And lead me on the path, with great love.
May the assembly of spiritual heroes and awareness holders
draw me forward,
Leading me on the path of radiant light,
Which is [the luminance of] coemergent pristine cognition.
May the supreme consorts, the hosts of dakinis, support me
from behind,
And, thus [encircled], may I be rescued
From the fearsome passageway of the intermediate state,
And be escorted to the [sacred] pure realm of the sky-farers.

By making this aspirational prayer with fervent devotion, you will dissolve into rainbow light, in the heart of the divine assembly of the awareness holders, and thereafter, undoubtedly, be born into the pure-realm of the sky-farers. (258)

xix) Obstruction of the womb entrances and the lights.
0, Child of Buddha Nature, if you have not taken to heart [the introduction] which has gone before, from now on, the body of your past life will grow more faint and the body of your next life will grow more vivid. At this, you will be dismayed,...Thinking in this way, you will move
haphazardly and randomly towards whatever might appear and consequently the six lights indicative of the six realms of living beings will dawn; and, according to your past actions, [the light of the realm] into which you are to be born will shine the most of all.
0, Child of Buddha Nature, listen!
What are these six lights,
you may ask?
A dull white light indicative of the realm of the gods
will arise.
A dull red light indicative of the realm of the antigods
will arise.
A dull blue light indicative of the human realm will
arise.
A dull green light indicative of the animal realm will arise.
A dull yellow light indicative of the realm of the anguished spirits will arise and a dull smoky light indicative of the realm of the hell-beings will arise.
These six lights will emerge.
And at this time,
your [present] body will take on the color of the light of the realm into which you are to be born.
0, Child of Buddha Nature, at this juncture, the essential points of the oral instructions are extremely important. (258)

xx) Instructions to Meditate on one's personal deity are suggested.
0, Child of Buddha Nature, if you have not attained recognition [as a result of the introductions] which have gone before, then, based on the potency of your past actions, the perception will arise that you are moving upwards, or moving horizontally or moving downwards. (286)

xxi) The oral teaching for the method which obstructs the person who is to enter the womb, is as follows:
O, Child of Buddha Nature, (call to the deceased by name) visualize

now your meditational deity, whichever it may be, with vibrancy.
[Meditate on the deity} as [vividly] apparent, yet completely lacking
in inherent existence, like [the reflection of] the moon in water.
If you do not have a specific meditational deity, then visualize the
lord Mahakarunika, again with great vibrancy.
Then, [gradually], dissolve [the image of] the meditational deity from the extremities
[inwards, until it disappears completely] and then meditate on the
[resultant union} of inner radiance and emptiness, which is utterly
free from any objective referent.
This is the profound essential point.
Meditate in this way, for it is said that by this means entry into a womb will be averted.
(287)

xxii) Seeing the future parents.
O, Child of Buddha Nature, at this stage, the perception will
arise of a male and a female engaging in sexual intercourse.
Upon perceiving this, do not enter between the male and the female, but
be mindful and 'meditate on' the male and the female as being
your 'spiritual teacher with consort'.
If you cannot prevent the process, then you will enter the womb.
(gender and form of birth reflect your attractions and aversions)
(one to be born male is jealous of and attached to the father and likewise female with the mother.) (289)

xxiii) Choosing a womb entrance
Then again, there are several kinds [of persons] who do not achieve
liberation, despite having received the above introductions and
having been taught the above visualisation techniques.' This [lack
of ability] comes about through limited familiarity with virtuous
past actions, extensive primal familiarity with non-virtuous. past
actions, and the potency and great force of negative obscurations. (293)

Child of Buddha Nature, now, [if you are to be born as a
human] the indications and signs which relate to the environment
into which you may be born, on one amongst the [four]
continents, will arise. You must recognise these [indications}!
Indeed, you must choose the continent based on [a careful examination
of these] indications of the environment into which you may
be born. (294)

xxiv) When you see these you can control and reverse the direction of your progress.
(instructions to choose the best place of rebirth)
Do not go here because the spiritual teachings do not flourish there:
Eastern continent - see a lake with swans
Western continent - see a lake with horses
Northern continent - see a lake with cattle

Instead go to the Southern continent where you see grand and delightful mansions. (295)

xxv) Rebirth realms
If you are to take birth as a god you will see delightful celestial palaces, many-storeyed and composed of diverse jewels. If indeed you can, you should enter here!
If you are to take birth as an antigod, you will see exquisite groves and spinning wooden torches [creating] wheels of fire. Do not enter there, under any circumstances! Call to mind the methods of reversal [and apply these}!
If you are to take birth as an animal, you will see rocky caverns, empty hollows and straw sheds, shrouded by mist. Do not enter there!
If you are to take birth as an anguished spirit, you will see tree-stumps, black protruding silhouettes, blind desolate gorges, or total darkness. Were you to go there, you would be born as an anguished spirit and experience the manifold sufferings of [insatiable] hunger and thirst. Do not enter there! Call to mind the methods of reversal [and apply these}! Be courageous and strong!
If you are to take birth as a hell being, you will hear the songs of those of negative past actions. Or, quite simply, you will feel powerless and compelled to enter. Whereupon, the perception will arise that you are moving into a land of darkness, where there are black and reddened houses, black Earth-pits and black roads. Were you to be drawn to this place, you would enter the hells, and experience the [searing] unbearable sufferings of heat and cold. Be careful! Do not enter into the midst of this, for there will be no opportunity to turn back. Do not enter there, under any circumstances!
As it is said [in the root verses}: 'You must obstruct the womb entrances and call to mind the methods of reversal.' These are [wholly] necessary now! (294)

xxvi) Choosing a womb for rebirth
(I would add here that most people who die will be reborn and will go through this process. Karma, laws of cause and effect' rush you here and it cannot be resisted now. You will have no choice but to move forward.)
O, Child of Buddha Nature, if, due to the potency of your past actions, you must at this stage enter a womb, a further teaching on the methods of choosing a womb entrance is now to be taught. Listen, {carefully], therefore! Do not just move towards whatever womb entrance appears to you. If, whilst being pursued by the avenging forces [of the laws of cause and effect], you are powerless [and unable to resist] the process of entering fa womb], then you must, at this time, meditate on Hayagriva. Since you now possess a subtle supernormal cognitive ability, you will [clearly] apprehend all the [potential] birthplaces as they arise, in sequence. Therefore,

make your choice, [based on the examination of the indications and based on the instructions}! There are two kinds of oral instruction [which can now be applied]: [first], the oral instructions for transferring the consciousness to the pure Buddha fields 36 and [second], the instructions for choosing a womb entrance within impure cyclic existence. Therefore, [listen carefully and] do as follows: (297)

xxvii) Directions to Buddha Lands.
First the transference of consciousness to the utterly pure realms of the sky farers is effected by those of highest ability, by directing their intention as follows. (directions to reach a Buddha Land are given)
Now, this cycle of existence disgusts me! It horrifies me! I have long been led astray by it! Now, the moment approaches for me to move forward! Now, I must take birth, miraculously, in the bud of a lotus flower, in the presence of the Buddha Amitabha, in the western Buddha field of the Blissful (Sukhavati)!' Focus your intention, concentratedly, on this thought! {It is essential that you make this effort!} Alternatively, you can focus your intention on whichever Buddha field you wish. On Manifest Joy (Abhirati), on Dense Array (Ghanavyuha), on Alakavati, on Mount Potalaka, or {you may wish to focus] on coming into the presence of {Padmasambhava of] Oefefiyana, in the celestial palace of Lotus Light, or indeed on whichever Buddha field you wish to enter. Be singleminded! Do not be distracted! Immediately upon establishing {this intention], you will take birth in the {chosen} Buddha field. Yet again, alternatively, if you wish to proceed into the presence of Maitreya in [the realm of] The Joyful (Tusita), think as follows: 'At this juncture in the intermediate state, the moment has come for me to proceed into the presence of the king of the [sacred] teachings, Maitreya, in [the realm of] The Joyful. Therefore, it is there that I will go!' If you focus your intention on this thought, you will take birth, miraculously, in the heart of a lotus, in the presence of Maitreya. (297)
Alternatively, if you are unable to accomplish this {transference}, or if you desire to enter a womb or you are obliged to enter one, then there are the following instructions on choosing a womb entrance within impure cyclic existence. Therefore, listen {carefully]. Utilizing the supernormal cognitive ability which you now possess, examine the continents once again, as just described, and make your choice. You must enter a land where the {sacred] teachings flourish! (298)

xxviii) Rebirth
{Be warned, however!} It could be that [in reality] you are about to take birth, by entering into a substance which is fetid and polluted, and yet that filthy mass will be perceived by you as

sweet-smelling and you will be drawn towards it and take birth within it. Therefore, whatever such [attractive] appearances may arise, do not grasp at them as substantially real! Ensure that you remain utterly free from the symptoms of attachment and aversion, and on that basis choose an excellent womb entrance.
It is extremely important that your motivation is firmly concentrated {as you approach the womb entrance]. (298)

xxix) Rebirth and choice.
Therefore, think as follows: 'Ah! For the sake of all sentient beings, I shall be born as a universal monarch, or [acting purely] like a great [dignified] sal tree, I shall be born into the brahman class, or as the child of an accomplished master, or into a family which maintains an immaculate lineage of the [sacred] teachings, or into a family where the mother and father are deeply devout. Then, once I have taken on a body which is blessed with the merit of being able to act on behalf of all sentient beings, I shall [dedicate myself to} acting on their behalf!' You must concentrate your motivation on this thought and [thus} enter the womb.
As you enter the womb, consecrate it [by perceiving it] as a celestial palace of the deities. Be full of devotion. Ensure that you enter whilst praying to and imagining that you are receiving empowerments from the conquerors of the ten directions and from their sons, as well as from the meditational deities and, in particular, from Mahakarunika.
[However, be warned], for as you make this choice of a womb entrance, there is a risk of error. There is the risk of error when, through the potency of past actions, an excellent womb entrance is perceived as a bad one, and when a bad womb entrance is perceived as a good one. At this time, the essential points of the teaching are crucial. Therefore, once again, you should act as follows. Even though perceptions of an excellent [womb entrance] may occur, do not become attached to these. And [conversely] even though perceptions of a poor [womb entrance] may occur, do not feel aversion. The essential point of the profound and genuine [instructions} is that you enter the womb in a state of great equanimity, utterly free from [the dichotomies of] good and bad, acceptance and rejection, or attachment and aversion. (299)

xxx) Affirmations and Prayers during rebirth.
O, as I roam in cyclic existence [driven] by the five virulent poisons,
May the transcendent conquerors, {the male Buddhas of the five enlightened families, draw me forward,
Leading me on the path of radiant light,
Which is the four pristine cognitions combined.

May the five supreme female Buddhas, {the purity of] the
expanse, support me from behind,
And, thus {encircled], may I be rescued
From the light-paths of the six impure classes [of beings]
And be escorted to the five utterly supreme and pure Buddha
fields.
O, as I roam in cyclic existence driven by deep-seated habitual
tendencies,
May the assembly of spiritual heroes and awareness holders
draw me forward,
Leading me on the path of radiant light,
Which is the coemergent pristine cognition.
May the supreme consorts, the hosts of dakini support me from behind (312)

Om Ah Hum
May the elements of space not arise as a hostile force.
May I see them as the field of the blue Buddha.
May the elements of water not arise as a hostile force.
May I see them as the field of the white Buddha.
May the elements of Earth not arise as a hostile force.
May I see them as the field of the yellow Buddha.
May the elements of fire not arise as a hostile force.
May I see them as the field of the red Buddha.
May the elements of wind not arise as a hostile force.
May I see them as the field of the green Buddha.
May the [awesome] sounds, lights and rays not arise as a
hostile force.
May I see them as the infinite fields of the Peaceful and
Wrathful Deities.
May the rainbow-coloured elements not rise up as a hostile
force.
May I see them as the fields of the manifold Buddhas.
May I recognise all sounds as my own sounds.
May I recognise all lights as my own lights.
May I recognise all rays as my own rays.
May I spontaneously recognise [the characteristics of] the
intermediate states.
May the fields of the three Buddha-bodies be manifest.
SAMAY A! (313)

xxxi) The Aspirational Prayer which Protects from Fear of the Intermediate States
When my life's course is ended
And I roam alone in the intermediate states
The loved one of this world can no longer help me.
So, at this critical time may the Conquerors, the Peaceful
and Wrathful Deities,

[Quickly] release the power of their Compassion.
And may the deep darkness of my ignorance be dispelled.
When I roam alone, separated from my loved ones
And myriad images of emptiness arise, naturally manifesting
May the Buddhas [quickly] release the power of their compassion
And may the fear of the awesome and terrifying intermediate states be annulled.
When the five radiant lights of pristine cognition dawn
May I recognize them as my own nature without awe and
without terror.
And as the manifold forms of the Peaceful and Wrathful Deities arise, May I be fearlessly confident and recognize the characteristics of the intermediate state. (315)

xxxii) Prayer.
When I see my future parents in union,
May I perceive them as Mahakarunika and consort,
And for the sake of others, being blessed with the power to
choose a birthplace,
May I achieve an exalted body, adorned with the auspicious
major and minor marks.
Once I have achieved birth in a supreme human form,
May I act so as to swiftly liberate all who see and hear me.
And may I not be influenced by my negative past actions,
But multiply and emulate my past merits. (315-6)[2]

(ii) Robert Aho. Western Tibetan Buddhist Delog. Poems.[3]

Below are four poems written by Robert Aho that are examples of Vajrayana philosophy and the after-death state of the Bardo.

a) Timeless Luminosity

The very first teaching was Dzogchen,
long before we had physical presence,
long before there were stars,
or the formation of planets,
long before the explosive beginning

[2] Karma-gliṅ-pa, Padma Sambhava, and Bstan-'dzin-rgya-mtsho, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead [English Title] : The Great Liberation by Hearing in the Intermediate States [Tibetan Title]*. Edited by Graham Coleman and Thupten Jinpa. Translated by Gyurme Dorje. Penguin Classics deluxe edition (Penguin, 2007).

[3] Robert Aho's Facebook page and website can be found here for reference: https://www.facebook.com/profile.php?id=100063211900429 ; https://www.timelessLuminosity.com/.

of this universe, or the one before it,
or before that, or even before that
through timeless beginnings and endings;
Dzogchen is timeless, originating
from primordial nature of mind,
luminous, with greater intensity than
all of the universe combined,
or even a million universes all at once,
or even every universe there has ever been;
It is luminous beyond all fabricated thoughts,
well beyond ordinary human perception;
Dzogchen is beyond all constraints,
beyond any potentiality
we think we may have,
beyond concept and reason,
or any idea;
AH
Dzogchen is
spacious conscious awareness,
empty cognizance,
Dharmakaya itself;
The primordial Buddha,
the first teacher,
Samantabhadra,
who came from beginningless beginnings,
who was not a being as we know beings to be,
is pure wisdom consciousness, empty awareness,
ultimate luminous compassion, bright light
all-good now perfection, perfect Luminosity,
the primordial Buddha of Dharmakaya,
teaching that most perfect teaching
luminous beyond all Luminosity,
the root of all Buddhas,
resting in that natural state, resting now
in that pure empty cognizance, beyond time,
that all-good awareness of this moment;
Dzogchen was always there, present
in the ever-luminous unborn wonder
of timeless Dharmakaya, beyond thought,
beyond all extremes and limitations;
With each Buddha, appearing as pure energy, lightness,
energetic sound, rays of color streaming in a realm
beyond our physical manifestation as we know it,
Dzogchen appeared in teaching form, at some point,
relating to the dimension of Sambhogakaya;
Beings of pure energy and light, would become

amazed at this display of pure wisdom
emanating from timeless Luminosity,
vibrations so much brighter than light;
AH
As it is;
When a Buddha would
appear in a physical dimension,
as Nirmanakaya Buddha,
observable by ordinary beings,
so, too, would Dzogchen appear in some way,
at some point,
revealing itself perfectly
when beings would be ready to hear it,
when they had evolved sufficiently enough
to remember the ever-present
original primordial teachings
that have been a part of all beings,
since beginningless time,
which continue to be a part of us all
in this instant of nowness, even though
we may be distracted and obsess about this or that,
the magical display of mind, ignorantly finding ourselves
trapped in a cycle of our own making, suffering,
not knowing that we are simply, perplexingly,
an emanation of the Dharmakaya as well,
not knowing what this Nirmanakaya is,
this physical illusory dimension of dream-like magic,
emanating timelessly from pure wisdom,
ultimate love and compassion, bodhicitta;
Ordinary beings fret about this teaching and
that teaching, not knowing what to believe,
saying, “Oh, Dzogchen is only a few centuries old,
so, it is just another teaching,” or “Wait, it was also
there a few thousand years before that with
another Buddha,” or “What about before that?
Is it not said that there are infinite Buddhas,
beginning with the primordial Buddha? Is it
also not said that time is possibly just
beginningless, or an illusion?
What about all these other teachings?”
or, “I have heard these teachings are found
on other planets as well, maybe thirteen
world systems, or more, or many more,
maybe all world systems have teachings,
trillions upon trillions of them,
all across multi-universes, too many

to fathom, some people believe that;”
Believe nothing!
It will only lead to ruin;
The primordial teachings are not belief, they
are direct experience of primordial wisdom!
They are not teachings of useless beliefs!
These teachings are ever-present and have always
been ever-present in this eternal now;
Timeless Luminosity is not outside yourself,
and it is not constrained by our limitations,
and notions of life, death, space and time!
Such knowledge cannot have a beginning,
it cannot have a place;
Stop your fretting!
Primordial wisdom,
which is timeless Luminosity, seen at death,
is beyond concept, has no beginning and no end,
it is as it is, beyond all;
Do not trust your limited view!
If you must believe something,
then only temporarily believe,
due to simply not being ready
for that knowledge;
Use your own ignorance as a tool
for awakening,
use compassionate wisdom
as a guide,
forming only useful beliefs, due to your own oblivion,
compassionate towards your own ignorant state,
with the notion that any belief must be
cast aside as something completely useless,
at some point, as you change,
as your capacity increases;
The Buddha, Buddha Shakyamuni taught this!
At some point, as your heart opens up, and
your capacity increases in that way,
you will know when you are ready to
seek teachings that will help, and
seek teachings everywhere, gathering them up
for the useful purpose of awakening;
Begin by simply knowing that this all
is just an illusion, a dream from which you
have not been able to awaken, and are not able
to remain at ease, as you would like;
So, simply seek teachings of Buddha, a being
of awareness, a being who can be seen only

with your heart, not your created ideas,
someone closer to you than you can imagine;
When you see Buddha, you see Luminosity,
you see great compassion, you see unlimited
love and wisdom, timelessly manifesting
in our limited physical reality;
Buddha Shakyamuni, the Buddha of our time,
began teaching in the physical dimension,
then he taught in the energetic dimension,
then he manifested in the primordial dimension;
Practice those teachings inwardly,
emanate those teachings outwardly,
increase your capacity secretly;
If you persist, remaining diligent,
compassionate towards yourself
in all ways possible, persevering
in your practice of mind, you
will awaken, the Dharmakaya
will, once again, manifest
within your entire presence of life,
your empty cognizance will become all-pervasive
in every moment of this magical display,
through awareness of your physical condition,
through awareness of your energy aspects,
through awareness of your primordial wisdom;
AH
Here at last that one taste of our real nature, beyond suffering,
that spacious consciousness of wisdom awareness
has arisen in every moment;
See it all as it is, just let it be,
rest in that primordial wisdom, be present
in that luminous state of our real nature
that we all know so well, but have forgotten;
You are Buddha.
OM
AH
HUM [4]

b) A poem: Bardo

[4] Robert Aho, "Timeless Luminosity Newsletter," Online Resource, April Issue, (4, 2024),(A poem from, Timeless Luminosity, 27-31, © 2020), https://www.timelessLuminosity.com/p/timeless-Luminosity-9c0?r=14gy1v&utm_campaign=post&utm_medium=web&fbclid=IwY2xjawEn5V1leHRuA2FlbQIxMQABHe9Mr2J0ehXCSHXCMAnPIQIe4McyiI7kRy6-1Za-gvESxtchxTEAZ88u-A_aem_J8uI12p14MUl-qwUP7jblg. Permission from Robert Aho published online "This post is public so feel free to share it."

For those who die - who die and then come back to life in the same body, as before, infinite blessings abound,
For those beings have tasted primordial wisdom recalling what has eluded them in life, remembering it as just so amazing.
This leads to a yearning that is so deep, yearning to return to that, that which seems so much like home, that
that infinite expanse, that luminous glow, that that wisdom beyond all reason, that that that timeless state of
blessing beyond being, beyond all that can reasonably be ascertained;
That yearning is yearning, just yearning for something that is never apart from this moment, this life,
that taste of a pure expansive bright light is not beyond what is here now;
To remain living, while knowing that, to remain in that knowledge is a blessing beyond all blessings,
there is no returning, we cannot return, because you have never left that;
To know this while living, one must train the mind, or reflect upon the last time you were dead,
one must look introspectively at that, one must relax, resting in that natural state of being, one must
endeavor to awaken to that, now, awakening to what we already know, though we have forgotten, one must
merely see that;
So, sit in this moment, without distraction, training in that, to not be distracted in the least,
do that for one moment, then do that for the next moment, and the next moment, in time this life appears as that
infinite brightness, timeless Luminosity.[5]

c) Poem: Nature of Mind

What is that bright sky?
AH
It is not out there,
it is in here,
yet, it is not in here either, nor is it both,
it is not this or that,
not other, not neither, not the same,

[5] Robert Aho, *Timeless Luminosity* (Robert Aho, 2020), 111- 112. Robert Aho, "Timeless Luminosity Newsletter," Issue 83, Feb 2024, https://www.timelessLuminosity.com/p/bardo-7d1. Permission from Robert Aho published online "This post is public so feel free to share it." (A poem from, Timeless Luminosity, 111-112, ©2020).

it is beyond what is, both and neither, beyond
what can be added or negated,
it cannot be located
in either time or space, where can it be?[6]

d) Poem: Quantum Illusion

The pure insanity of this place,
this world, this small corner of this energetic
appearance materializing, quite simply
it boggles the mind;
Ignorance and destruction, grasping
making sure it will keep happening in an eternal spiral,
crazy people eating flesh from their own mother's bones,
desire for more of that insanity, and more and more . . . and more,
it brings such profound sadness to bear
for those who can see just what is going on here;
It is all illusion. HO HO HO![7]

[6] Robert Aho, "Timeless Luminosity Newsletter, Nature of Mind," Issue 69, November 2023, https://www.timelessLuminosity.com/p/nature-of-mind. Permission from Robert Aho published online "This post is public so feel free to share it."

[7] Robert Aho, "Timeless Luminosity Newsletter, Quantum Illusion," Issue 70, November 2023, https://www.timelessLuminosity.com/p/quantum-illusion. Permission from Robert Aho published online "This post is public so feel free to share it." Also, in Robert Aho, *The Frog: A Spiritual Autobiography, Spanning Many Lifetimes* (Independently published, 2021).

Appendix 6

Tibetan Philosophy

The concepts listed below are essential to know for a proper understanding of Vajrayana philosophy concerning the afterlife, the Bardos, cosmology and the composition of consciousness and reality.

a) The Five Skandhas (upadanaskandha)

b) Buddha Nature, 'self' and 'no-self'

c)The Bardo Body

d)The Eight types of consciousness and the bodies.

e) What is the Bardo?

f) Samsara and the six Bardos

h) The Three *Kayas*

i) The Cosmology of the Six realms in Samsara and their entities: and other entities

j) Rebirth

k) Emptiness (*sunyata*)

l) Death and Dying

m) Dissolution of the elements in death.

n) Alternatives to the Bardo to rebirth route.

o) Death and Sky burial

p) Formal teachings versus the individual experiences of Delogs. (*'das-log*)[1]

q) Other ways to reach the Bardo or invisible realms.

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[1] See Sogyal Rinpoche, Patrick Gaffney, and Andrew Harvey, *The Tibetan book of Living and Dying*. Vol. 19 (Rider, 1992), 331.

r) Synopsis of the *Bardo Thödol*:

s) Other Bardo Texts

t) Contemporary Bardo teachings in the West

u) Description of the Buddha Fields and Pure Lands which grew out of the Indian Mahayana

v) Analysis, implications and current debate.

w) Other studies comparing NDEs to Tibetan Buddhism

x) Tibetan ideas about Consciousness

a) The five *Skandhas* (*upadanaskandha*) - The physical body and the personality in life are composed of five skandhas which are impermanent and transient in nature. Body (rupa), sensation (*vedana*), perception (samjna), motivation (samskara), and awareness (*vijnana*).[2] After death karma propels the Bardo Being through the Bardo and into a rebirth. As Lauf explains," It is not the previously existing person as a constellation of the five skandhas who appears in a new incarnation, but his karma, the consequence of actions begun and not yet worked through."[3] b) Buddha Nature, self and no self - What exactly is moving through the Bardos? It is not exactly 'me' or my 'ego', but it is a subtle mind entity which carries awareness and *karma*.[4] Who is reborn is the karmic flow of cause and effect which is connected to the previous life, but it is not the same person being reborn, even though more highly realized beings can remember past lives. Ego (dak dzin) means grasping to a self, and it is a false construction. c)The Bardo body[5] is composed of a subtle awareness-principle 'body.' (*Citta/manas* which form a manomaya- kāya,

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[2] Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan*,18.

[3] Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan,* 20.

[4] Karma is simply the result of our past actions, even in previous lives. It can be increased and decreased by certain actions.

[5] Body has two meanings: the physical body and the Kaya, or invisible body as a form of being.

which is also called a *gandhabba*). [6] It is also referred to as mind (*sem*).[7] I am in agreement with Lauf who insists that this Bardo Body, carrying *karma*, is not like the Western human soul in Western religions. They are different concepts.[8] While it is quite possible, I think, for all humans to have a similar OBE or feeling of coming out of the body at death, what is actually occurring is not necessarily the same as religious explanations of the afterlife of '*Christian souls'* and '*ganahabbas*.' Lama Zopa describes its properties which are reminiscent of some NDE experiences,

The intermediate state body is indestructible, like a *vajra*, like diamond. It has no resistance; nothing can resist it. It also has certain karmically derived psychic powers. It can instantly arrive wherever it thinks of being. But it also undergoes much suffering, for example, feeling as if it is buried under ground and being pressed down by huge mountains. It also has illusory visions, but not realizing that these are projected by its own mind, it becomes very frightened. It feels as if it is being blown about uncontrollably from place to place by a strong red wind or a fierce storm, or caught in a noisy fire, or drowning in an ocean with huge, wrathful waves. It might see karmically created yamas – monsters with terrifying bodies and fearful animal heads – chasing it, shouting, trying to beat and destroy it. It has many frightening experiences like these.[9]

Lekshe Tsomo explains that actual belief often falls midway between orthodox and folklore interpretations that might stem more from the Bon indigenous tradition concerning a

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[6] Lal, "Out-of-Body Experience (OBE) and Manomaya Kaya." Pure Dhamma, February 10, 2023, https://puredhamma.net/abhidhamma/gandhabbaya-manomaya-kaya/manomaya-kaya-and-out-of-body-experience-obe/.

[7] Robert R. Desjarlais, *Sensory Biographies : Lives and Deaths among Nepal's Yolmo Buddhists* (University of California Press, 2003), 56. *Tanya* Zivkovic, *Death and Reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism: In-between Bodies* (Routledge, 2014), 27. The *sem* mind travels in dreams during life, and after in the bardo.

[8] Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan,* 20.

[9] Thubten Zopa, *Heart Advice for Death and Dying* (FPMT Education Publication, 2008), 72.

'soul-like' entity, called a '*La*." He explains that Tibetan Buddhism, is slightly different from Mahayana traditions, in that it mentions the '*La*' concept, which means a personal life force.[10] He says that the 'la' can leave the body and even wander off and get lost, and rituals are carried out to protect it. [11]

The after-death Bardo visions - It is believed that Bardo Beings have clairvoyant powers and can hear and see their families and bodies on the Earth plane, although they remain invisible. They can also read the minds of other Bardo Beings and the living This is reminiscent of NDE reports of telepathy and mind reading the minds of those on Earth, and even feeling the emotions and perspectives of others in the life review and other beings around them. Pema Chödrön describes a Bardo Being as being a flow of moments of consciousness all connected to an underlying consciousness in process of fluidity.[12] Whereas in English there is one word for consciousness in Tibetan there are two forms, direct perception and conceptual cognition, and there are eight aspects which involve our reactions, processing and interpretation of the perceptions or cognitions, and this is where distortion and misunderstandings occur.[13]

d)The eight types of consciousness and the bodies.[14] - The first five are the sense consciousnesses (eye, ear, nose, tongue, and body feeling, and the sixth is mind. The seventh is the Klesha or deluded consciousness which includes our misguided opinions and concepts. The

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[10] Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Into the Jaws of Yama, Lord of Death : Buddhism, Bioethics, and Death* (State University of New York Press, 2006), 81.

[11] Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Into the Jaws of Yama,* 81.

[12] Pema Chödrön, "What Goes Through the Bardos?" *Tricycle The Buddhist Review*. Winter 2022, https://tricycle.org/magazine/pema-chodron-bardos/. Our bodies are similarly unstable, changing so much in a lifetime that all our cells are new, and yet related in a flow.

[13] Tsomo, Karma Lekshe, *Into the Jaws of Yama,* 33.

[14] Tsomo, Karma Lekshe*, Into the Jaws of Yama,* 32-33. He says that "The terms "consciousness" (jnana), awareness (buddhi), and knowing (*saμvedana*) are used synonymously. These terms are generally preferred to the term "mind," which may connote something more solid or enduring. The term consciousness is also used to denote the mental continuum—a sequence of impermanent, dependently arising moments of awareness (*citta*)."

eighth is the Alayavijnana, base or storehouse consciousness, which is the base of our minds, where karmic sees are stored. It is the ground of our illusion of dualism in our perception of reality, but his part of our mind can be transformed into wisdom if we practice the path of meditation [15] and Vajrayana. In Vedanta and Hindu philosophy there is the idea of layers of five subtle bodies (*kosha*) or *panchakosha* that sheath the inner atman.[16] Tibetan Buddhism rejects the idea of an *atman* in the Hindu sense although anatman does not negate some entity reincarnates in Samsara. There is an entity, but it changes and does not exist independently to others. Similarly, there is a body, but its form is not what seems to exist in the Earth world. It is impermanent and replaceable, like changing vehicles as the entity/*jiva* traverses Samsara. [17]The so-called body is an illusory form (*rupa*) [18] and this explains why enlightenment lamas can attain the rainbow body,[19] whereupon after death, the physical form dissolves into Clear Light, and only hair and nails remain. The Ultimate Body, the *Dharmakaya* is formless. In funerary texts such as the *Bardo Thödol*, the dissolution of the body is intricately described as well as the visions that accompany it. To understand why this is described one must understand how the 'body' is thought to be composed. Tangible matter is arranged from space, air, fire, water, and Earth and in a body, it is animated by winds that circulate in channels and *nadis*. The cosmos possesses the same elements. Tibetan Buddhism avoids Cartesian and Western mind-body

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[15] Two main types of meditation are Shamatha(calm abiding by following breath) and Vipassana (insight-control of the mind in concentration or mindfulness).

[16] *Taittiriya Upanishad* (2.1-5) Shakyamuni Buddha denied the Hindu conception of the atman. However, he did not teach that awareness ceases with death. He did not advocate extinction. In a middle way he denied both immortality and extinction and nihilism.

[17] Badham, Paul, and Paul H. Ballard. *Facing Death : An Interdisciplinary Approach*. (University of Wales Press, 1996),178. -- *jiva* simply means 'life-force' in relation to a mindstream entity.

[18] Tanya Maria Zivkovic, "Tibetan Buddhist Embodiment: The Religious Bodies of a Deceased Lama."in *Body & society* 16, no. 2 (2010): 119-142. Tanya Zivkovic, *Death and Reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism: In-between Bodies* (Routledge, 2014).

[19] Achieved by the practice of Tögal or "Direct Crossing".

dualism, not just because the physical body is seen as illusory and impermanent but also because only awareness permeates everything. It is a non-dualistic philosophical system. Unlike the Abrahamic faiths, one creates and carries one's own karma, rather than facing a personal creator as a judge. While the Indic god Yama appears in the testimonies of the Delogs, he judges the karma rather than the person. Yet similarities with Western Religions, is that the consequences of humans' actions carry on after death.[20]

My Tibetan teachers always say that we ought to be grateful to have the blessing of a human body. This is because having a human body provides the best chance to obtain liberation. An animal cannot attain liberation.

e) What is the Bardo? (*antarabhava*) The word Bardo refers to a liminal phase of transition between two realms or life stages in the cycle of existence, literally translated as 'between two,' or 'in-between stage'. It is often referred to as the 'intermediate state.' Whereas in the Abrahamic view Earth and heaven are more or less stable until the Day of Judgement, and progress through them is linear, in Tibetan Buddhist cosmology there is a cyclical progression of soul development, or regression. There are considered to be six Bardos which mark short transition points between different levels of awareness linked to bodily or non-physical states such as waking, dreaming, meditating, dying, after death, and rebirth. The Wheel of Life or *bhavachakra* illustrates this cycle.[21]

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[20] Karma Lekshe Tsomo*, Into the Jaws of Yama*.

[21] Arthur Lederman, and Patricia Bjaaland, *The Wheel of Life: The Autobiography of a Western Buddhist* (Shambhala,1973). This book has a cover image of the Wheel of Life. https://www.shambhala.com/the-wheel-of-life.html.

f) Samsara and the Six Bardos - Cyclic existence has no beginning and incorporates many worlds and forms of existence. This is called Samsara, and it is driven by karma,[22] the law of cause and effect. [23] The nature of Samsara is impermanence and every changing states. Sentient beings, such as humans, are considered essentially good, with an inner Buddha Nature, which has become shrouded in confusion, and ignorance of its true nature. Attachment and delusion cause suffering, and poor choices lead to the accumulation of negative karma. This keeps beings trapped in the cycle of Samsara. It is said that Nirvana and Samsara are one and the same, but the deluded beings cannot understand this. Karma and one's state of mind are the main drivers of the outcome in the intermediate state. Tibetan Buddhism is often referred to as a non-dualistic system, but stressing polarity is over emphasized, even naïve, because it operates only at one level. Nirvana and Samsara are the same. There is no mind versus matter because it is all interconnected. There appears to be self and others, but at another level it is the same. So, duality tends to operate in Samsara and non-duality at higher levels, just as the Buddhas themselves can have three forms of emanation in the three *kayas*, moving from non-form and into form. Both physical and mental are emanations of one process. To understand what Ultimate Reality in Tibetan Buddhism is, we need to understand the Hopkins' ideas. Ultimate Reality, which is one concept in English, can mean several different things in Tibetan. He argues that the ultimate goal is not my own Nirvana but helpfulness to other beings i.e., the ideal of the Bodhisattva.

Jorge Ferrer argues for a multiplicity of what he calls 'Ultimate Realities' but these also are I think not necessarily the same 'Ultimate Reality of Vajrayana. I instinctively feel that there is one Ultimate Universal Consciousness. I also feel that it has a divine personality. This is my

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[22] Thubten Zopa, *Heart Advice for Death and Dying* (FPMT Education Publication, 2008), 17.
[23] Thubten Zopa, *Heart Advice for Death,* 12.

own view; however, it is conjecture and speculation and any one of the schemes, all, some or none, might be right. The goal of this dissertation is not to choose Ultimate Realities or to say how Heavenly Father relates to Ultimate Reality, since this is impossible. Universal consciousness seems to act like the divine, but it might be many things, appear in multiple ways, or be beyond our all our conceptions. My goals are simply to point out that consciousness connects all the dots and is omnipresent. It appears that consciousness is part of life, and continues after death, and that other types of beings and forms have consciousness. I would also add that this universal consciousness is loving, it interacts, and it is encountered in NDEs.

(g) The six Bardos are:[24]

1) the Bardo of waking, of this life - *Kyenay Bardo* (*skye gnas bar do*)

2) the Bardo of dreaming - *Milam Bardo* (*rmi lam bar do*)

3) the Bardo of meditation - *Samten Bardo* (*bsam gtan bar do*)[25]

4) the Bardo of dying - *Chikhai Bardo* (*chi kha'i bar do*) This is painful and full of suffering.

5) the luminous Bardo of Dharmata - *Chönyi Bardo* (chos nyid bar do)

6) the Bardo of becoming/ rebirth - *Sidpa Bardo* (srid pa bar do)[26]

There are Bardos surrounding death. There are always opportunities for liberation and in these three Bardos the opportunities abound for those instructed and aware. Choice and good

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[24] Ole Nydahl, *Fearless Death: Buddhist Wisdom on the Art of Dying* (Buddhismus Stiftung Diamantweg, 2012), 23-27.

[25] Meditation is' *gom'* in Tibetan meaning "to become familiar with your mind." 'The purpose of meditation in general is to gain the direct experience of the clear light and to gain sufficient experience to achieve liberation during the first phase of the interval at death.' See Rinpoche, Khenpo Karthar. *Bardo-Interval of Possibility: Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche's Teaching on Aspiration for Liberation in the Bardo*. (KTD Publications, 2007).

26 R. Gyaltrul, and B. A. Wallace, *Natural Liberation: Padmasambhava's Teachings on the Six Bardos* (Wisdom Publications,1998). Chögyam Trungpa, *Transcending madness: The Experience of the Six Bardos* (Shambhala Publications, 1992).

decisions can result in a good rebirth in a Pure Land of higher realm, even if liberation is not achieved. For those who remain confused rebirth into Samsara is automatic in one of the six realms of existence: the god realm, demigod realm, human realm, animal realm, hungry spirit realm, or hell realms. The human realm offers the best chance for liberation. The hells are hot and cold, hungry ghosts suffer from hunger and thirst that cannot be satisfied, animals suffer from their condition, in the human ream there is ignorance and suffering and sickness. Even the gods battle amongst each other and are not satisfied. One must have compassion for all these trapped beings.

1) Chikhai Bardo: The Dzogchen concept of the Bardo of reality itself, the Clear Light which is the primordial ground 's original pure radiance.[27] The clear light appears after death and it is a fleeting moment, often going unnoticed. However high Lamas and practioner can remain in this Clear Light for days. This is called Clear Light Meditation[28], and those who recognize it are liberated. It is this aspect of the Pure Light that has led some people to ask if it is the light experienced in NDEs. One is encouraged to embrace the light as eagerly as a child embraces its mother. As Chökyi Nyima says. "The uncompounded essence of the present consciousness, free from mental constructs, is the empty Luminosity of primordial purity. When dying we should recognize this empty essence. The one who recognizes such a state of empty awareness at the moment of death attains enlightenment in *Dharmakaya*." [29] "Prior to the Bardo of Dharmata various manifestations appear mirages, five-colored lights, and experiences similar to sunlight,

[27] Cuevas*, Hidden History*, 63.

[28] It is said that the Clear Light also can appear in between other bardos such as dreaming and awakening, and also during orgasm.

[29] Chökyi Nyima, *The Bardo Guidebook*. 10.

moonlight, the light of a butter lamp and darkness. When these have ceased, the ground Luminosity that is beyond all of these displays dawns like a clear and cloudless sky."[30]

In the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* Evans-Wentz describes the Clear Light as: "As being colorless, without qualities, it is the Clear Light; as being without limitations, It is All-Pervading Intelligence."[31]

2) Chönyid Bardo: apparitions of the 42 Peaceful and 58 Wrathful deities. This period can last for 14 days. The deities represent projections of one's own mind, however if this is not recognized there is no liberation at this stage. The peaceful Deities appear in the first seven days, and the Wrathful in the second seven days. Recognition of these as aspects of one's own mind equals instant liberation. It is rare to achieve liberation at this state because it is so fast and fleeting. Strangely in NDEs when the Light is encountered it is neither fleeting nor fast but constant and lasts a while. NDErs meet it and communicate with it and can be enveloped by its love, without losing their own identity. It is a different kind of experience perhaps.

3) Sidpa Bardo: The Bardo of becoming is when the deceased wanders confused in the Bardos looking for rest and rebirth. Sounds are heard, flashing lights are seen and it can be frightening. This is a good time to be grounded in *Yidam*[32] practice.

Cuevas believes the modern Tibetan six stage cycle of the Bardos, which came from older roots, was consolidated as it is today in the 13th century, and became the preferred format among followers of the Nyingmapa and Kagyupa lineages. [33]He says: a distinctively tantric

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[30] Nyima, *Bardo Guidebook,* 113.

[31] Evans-Wentz, *Tibetan Book of the Dead,* 166.

[32] A special personal deity, in a Nirmanakaya form, that helps one achieve transformation and realization through meditation and visualization. https://Buddhaweekly.com/the-lightning-path-of-buddhism-the-power-of-yidams/.

[33] Nyingma is the closest school to Bonpo roots.

soteriology and expanded the term's (Bardo's) meaning to include a plurality of intermediate-state phases."[34]

In the *Bardo Thödol* and the *Peaceful and Wrathful Deities* we find the cosmology and structure of the afterlife and Samsara standardized and these funerary texts and associated rituals spreading across Tibet. There is power and opportunity are each point of transition between the Bardos. For example, while there is general agreement that karma, which accrues with our behaviors and actions, governs the quality of our rebirth. It is also believed that one's countenance and emotional state of mind at death can override karma. Thus, even a criminal can reach enlightenment or achieve a good birth if they die in a positive happy state of mind and make the crucial recognitions in the Bardo after death. [35]This is why the deathbed room should be quiet and serene, so the dying can be protected from the grief of relatives and also from worldly attachments. It is also why dying Tibetans give away their material belongings, to free themselves from any links to life that would hold them back. The idea of the death wandering as *pretas* or spirts after death, is both linked to the indigenous Bon ideology[36] and to Indian beliefs.[37] Bon and Tibetan Buddhist beliefs in the afterlife share many similarities.[38] Tibetan Buddhism is itself a mélange of spiritual currents, that have developed into a unique expression, and tantra, also originating in India, is one aspect that has strong influences. All of these aspects influence modern Tibetan ideas of the afterlife. e.g., tantra added the idea of many levels of after death Bardos to the basic Indian Buddhist model.

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[34] Cuevas, *Hidden History,* 63.

[35] This contrasts with the Christian ethical idea that murderers are likely going to hell unless their repentance is accepted and they are forgiven.

[36] Bon religion had the idea of spirits facing dangers while crossing perilous passages. See Cuevas, *Hidden History,* 68.

[37] See Cuevas, *Hidden History,* 39-42.

[38] Karma Lekshe Tsomo. *Into the Jaws of Yama,* 81.

h) The Three Kayas – There are three main manifestations of reality called the three *kayas* (bodies) which refer of the three manifestations of a Buddha's bodies – *Dharmakaya. Sambhogakaya* and *Nirmanakaya.* These three bodies are connected to the Bardos of existence. They are not actually separate from the top-down perspective of Ultimate Reality but from a human perspective they appear separate. Just as water can be ice, water or steam, so humans and Buddhas can exist in different forms. The key to attaining a higher form is linked to the attainment of wisdom and the loss of ignorance about the real state of Samsara, and the ability to recognize illusion. Out of these ideas came the Deity Yoga practices, and meditation techniques involving the visualization of deities and mandalas aimed at training for the transition of consciousness at death. The crux is that one must identify with the deity, or the entity envisioned.[39] Training in life to recognize one's personal Buddha or Lama as oneself, can be applied in the Bardo after death, cut through illusion and aid in liberation.[40] Many books, especially those published by Shambhala, explore teachings about these realms along with key concepts in Dzogchen and Vajrayana teachings.

i) *Dharmakaya* (Luminosity) and the three *kayas* - Liberation is realization that one's is of the same essential nature as the *Dharmakaya*. Tantric Vajrayana is considered the quickest and most direct form of Buddhism to achieve this goal through 'skillful means,' compassion and knowledge and devotion to one's guru teacher (who is identified as your Buddha) Realization that there is no ego and abandoning the attachment to yourself as a self – entity is key. It is

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[39] Tibetan Buddhism has no god or deity in the Christian or Abrahamic sense. However, there is room in the philosophy for various types of entities, for Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, dakinis and other entities, which appear in Samsara. Whether these are actual or metaphorical beings is often debated. The answer is both and neither! It all relates to the process of awareness coming into and out of form, with nonduality underlying all multiplicity.

[40] Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche, *Six Bardos of the Tibetan Book of the Dead: Dzogchen Teachings on the Peaceful and Wrathful... Deities* (Inner Traditions, 2024). The latest book to be published this year on the six bardos is by the late Khenchen Palden Sherab Rinpoche and Khenpo Tsewang Dongyal Rinpoche. They also refer to the *Bardo Thödol*.

important to attain *rigpa*, or knowledge of the clear -light mind as opposed to ignorance. [41]Another foundational concept is that of the three *Kayas (bodies)* or *trikaya*. The deities encountered in the *Bardo Thödol* are understood within this framework. The best definition of the *Dharmakaya* is offered by Lauf: "The *Dharmakaya* (*Chos-kyi-sku*) is the essence of doctrine and reality, it is highest Being as truth in itself, it has no form and is not visible. Its nature is the primordial ground of all appearances, emptiness (sunyata) as the condition of plurality, and from the psychological standpoint of the Tibetan Book of the Dead, it is the all-containing and all-embracing ground consciousness (*alayavijnana*)."[42] All Buddhas are identical with the *Dharmakaya,* beyond all concepts and ideas. It is arguable that this corresponds to the Western idea of universal consciousness, the apophatic energy behind the cosmos that is aware, alive, omnipresent, omniscient and all compassionate. Perhaps it is the realm of '*al-Haqq"*? [43]Buddhism would say that there is no return from resting in the Clear Light but NDEs contradict this, if in fact the Light is the same, which is an assumption and mere speculation.

(ii) Sambhogakaya is the realm of the Buddhas who come into a more recognizable 'form' as Bodhisattvas. (*Byangchub sems-dpa'*). Their vow is to intervene to aid all sentient beings trapped in Samsara. The goal of Nirvana [44]is postponed and is replaced by the goal of becoming a Bodhisattva. A Bodhisattva had vowed to intervene in the world to help sentient beings until all are liberated. [45]They also work in the Pure Lands to guide beings to liberation

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[41] '*Rig-pa'* is awareness that is pure and free from dualistic perceptions. '*Sems'* is mind when consciousness is caught in duality of perception in Samsara.

[42] Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan,* 24.

[43] *I am the Truth, ana al-Haqq* as pronounced by Mansur Al-Hallaj (c.858-922) while referring to Allah (SWT) and not to any Buddhist concept, is nevertheless and example of the similarities that can superficially be seen in mystical and anomalous experiences. Has non-material consciousness been experienced universally?

[44] T. Ryan Byerly, *Death, Immortality, and Eternal Life* (Routledge, 2021), 11, 167. Mikel Burley notes that Buddhists disagree about aspects and conceptions of Nirvana.

[45] Alan Watts, *Buddhism, the Religion of No-Religion: The Edited Transcripts* (C.E. Tuttle, 1996), 90. Bodhisattvas are not detached but remain present to help humans escape Samsara.

there. It is this form that is used in Deity Yoga. This realm can be interpreted in supernatural ways, it is not imaginary.

(iii)Nirmanakaya is the form of Buddhas on the Earthly plane. Siddhartha Buddha is an example of a *nirmanakaya* form.

The three *kayas* are represented in the Bardo Thödol as the three levels of experience from dying, to seeing the Clear Light, and then seeing the forms of the Buddhas, and into rebirth. While this is not a trinity, this system does represent the three forms of the Buddhas. In the text Many Buddhas and their families and consorts are named, which corresponds to this system. Humans participate in the *trikaya* system in the sense that the pathway to enter the higher forms is open upon liberation leading to a *kaya* transformation. The *trikaya* is also attached to three specific Bardo states: (*Dharmakaya* - Bardo of the Death experience *Chikhai* Bardo and Bardo of meditation. *Sambhogakaya* - *Chönyid* Bardo and Dream Bardo. *Nirmanakaya* - Sidpa Bardo.)

i) The Cosmology of the Six realms in Samsara and their entities: and other entities

The Buddhist worldview of the six realms of rebirth includes different types of gods, animals, hungry ghosts, hell beings and demons. [46] One's choices in the Bardo and one's karma determine in which realm one is reborn. Many Bardo Beings become overwhelmed and require help. Owing to the nearly helpless condition of the deceased in the Bardo, guidance in addition to the recited words of the *Bardo Thödol* is needed,[47] as Matthew T. Kapstein says,

[46] Nydahl, *Fearless Death,*153.
[47] Some translations write *Thodrol*.

"intercession by the enlightened Buddhas or Bodhisattvas is required to aid one in realizing a favorable realm." [48]

Other entities: One topic that is often avoided in Western Buddhist literature is whether these forms of the Buddha and Buddhas in the plural are actual entities that 'exist'. The answer is both yes and no. While on one level Buddhas might appear to be mind projections, on another they correspond to mindstreams, (*citta-santāna)* that are liberated and have lost the illusion of being sperate entities. The many emanations of Buddha are in fact One at the level of *Dharmakaya*. From our human perspective their actual form cannot be understood, given our level of delusion. When Buddhism came West it was intentionally stripped of all aspects of "superstition" and sanitized so it could appeal to rational post -religious people and much erroneous emphasis was placed on the atheism of its philosophy. [49]This is a gross misunderstanding. Tibetans especially live close to nature and have concepts of nature spirits, nagas, dakinis, ghosts, and a multitude of spiritual beings. Even the most sophisticated rituals involve asking permission from the resident land spirits and offering them gifts of *tormas* to placate them. [50]In a similar vein Nirvana is misunderstood in the West as meaning 'nothingness" or "emptiness". These translations do not carry Tibetan meanings. Nirvana is that state where enlightenment is reached, and the real true nature of reality is realized.[51] It is empty of illusion but that does not equate to nothingness. This error was perpetuated by atheist interpretations in the West. Of course, there are many Buddhism's and variations within Buddhism, as many

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[48] Matthew T. Kapstein, Tibetan Buddhist afterlife beliefs and funerary practices, Ch. 14. in Moreman, ed. *The Routledge Companion,*144.

[49] Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Into the Jaws of Yama.*

[50] I attended a ritual in the Garchen Institute in Arizona where clay tormas were taken outside to the four directions at each corner of the Temple, to placate the indigenous native spirits of the land, conceived of as invisible entities that deserve respect.

[51] See Mikel Burley, Death, Immortality and Nirvana in Buddhist Traditions: A Study in the Hermeneutics of Contemplation in T. Ryan Byerly, ed. *Death, Immortality, and Eternal Life* (Routledge, 2021).

religions have denominations, but the Tibetan forms contain a rich and populated idea of sprit worlds. There are many Western misunderstandings about Buddhism and spiritual entities, even amongst Western converts and their descendants, Tibetans do believe in spirits. It is often not the atheistic rational faith described by orientalists. Western converts often do not take spirits seriously yet in Arizona at the Garchen Institute I witnessed that *torma* were offered to placate the indigenous land spirits before ceremonies in the Temple. At the ultimate level everything is an illusion but at the practical level on Earth. It is commonly accepted that invisible spirits interact with this world, and they are treated with the respect also due to humans. This explains the role of *ngakpas* in the local traditions, who use protective shamanic 'magic' and the tantric powers of Dzogchen to heal, to use divination, and provide amulet protection. They represent the Secret level in the tripartite division of Vajrayana into outer, inner and secret. Also in Tibetan Buddhism, as well as spirits there are devas, animals, hungry ghosts and hell beings, so humans are only one out of multitudes of being types in six main realms. Yidam's are the images of our deities conjured up in meditational concentrative thought. It is wrong to dismiss them as invented, nor do they exist in isolation, but they exist because the interaction with them exists and if they are Buddhas they exist on multiple levels. How they appear depends on the energy behind them.

Yama[52] is an example of a Hindu god imported into Tibetan Buddhism and who also features as a central figure in Hindu NDEs.[53] In Karma Lekshe Tsomo's classic book *Into the Jaws of Yama,*[54] he links the Tibetan view of death and *Bardo* in the after death realm with the

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[52] Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Into the Jaws of Yama.* Alyson Prude, and Kunzang Drolkar, A Delog in Eastern Tibet in Karma Lekshe Tsomo, ed. *Eminent Buddhist Women* (State University of New York Press, 2014), 181.

[53] In the typical Hindu NDE a person experiences sitting in a waiting room and is then told by the Yama's clerk that their name isn't in the books, their 'death' was a case of mistaken identity, and they must return.

[54] Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Into the Jaws of Yama.*

concept of impermanence, the nature of consciousness and its transference at death.[55] He says, "The last moment of awareness in one lifetime acts as the cause of the next moment of awareness, which is the first moment of the next state of existence. Understanding the nature of consciousness is thus crucial for understanding the process of dying and rebirth." Images of Yama can be found in Tibetan art and in Temples. Yama judges the dead also known as Kalarupa The wheel of life, Bhavachakra shows the realms of the Samsara, the realms of rebirth being held in the arms of Yama with big teeth. He has an adversary, Yamantaka, the destroyer of Death, who is a form of Manjushri.[56] Yama is featured both in the *Bardo Thödol* and in Delog accounts.

j) Rebirth – Rebirth involves being reborn into one of the six realms of existence because the Bardo Being filed to attain enlightenment in the Bardo state.[57]Both choice and karma decide the nature and level of the rebirth. A poor mindset and confusion, and poor karma can propel the Bardo Being into a lesser rebirth in the hell realms, or animal realms, especially if they are attached to worldly things. On the other hand, an enlightened being can choose to return to a human body in the Bodhisattva role in order to serve and aid those who suffer. Recently in 2023, Lama Zopa Rinpoche passed away, after a state of *thugdam*, and prayers and rituals are being

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[55] According to some Tibetan schools, only the *Dharmakaya* is permanent in some respects, but not in all. (The Mahayana tradition has various interpretations) It always expands, and changes as is the nature of being and mind, these English words are not the best translations. Stability would be a better approximation. *Dharmakaya* is not like Brahman which has more intrinsic permanence. The *Dharmakaya* is a deathless state. Lekshe Tsomo describes consciousness in the Tibetan tradition: "By consciousness, Buddhists simply mean knowing or awareness.

Consciousness is not a solid or enduring entity, but simply an impermanent stream or continuity of conscious moments. Each moment of consciousness gives rise to a subsequent moment of consciousness, in accordance with the law of cause and effect. These conscious events—mental or sensory—continue from moment to moment like a string of pearls, each moment giving rise to the next. Even during sleep, the continuum of consciousness is present in a subtle form. Karma Lekshe Tsomo, *Into the Jaws of Yama,* 29, 32.

[56] These concepts are often depicted in art such as featured online in the Philadelphia Museum of Art, and the Met Museum, https://philamuseum.org/collection/object/58639 and https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/37807. Pratapaditya Pal, *Art of Tibet: a Catalogue of the Los Angeles County Museum of Art Collection* (Univ of California Press, 1983).

[57] Bardo in Sanskrit is antarabhava/ अन्तराभव (intermediate existence).

held to influence his reincarnation.[58] His followers still feel a connection with his mind stream and await his rebirth. Same high Lamas and Tulkus are realized beings who have chosen to serve on Earth in the *nirmanakaya* form. They are seen as emanations of the *trikaya*.[59]Recognized reincarnations are an important part of the tradition.[60] Their deaths are different from those of ordinary people.[61]Rainbows in the sky are a sign of liberation or a saintly death in the case of a Lama. Supernatural phenomena are often reported with such deaths. Such Lamas can incarnate consciously, and alter the weather and produce rainbows, and their bodies are reported not to decay while they stay in Clear Light mediation for days (*thugdam*), or to shrink until only nails and hair are left.[62] Such miraculous deaths are referred to as the rainbow body phenomena.[63]

k) The six paramitas or perfections. - These are qualities which can lead to enlightenment. They are generosity, discipline (ethics and refraining from harm), patience, joyful effort or diligence, meditative concentration and wisdom.[64] Tibetan Buddhist philosophy is very complicated and intense. The theory of causality is called (Pratītyasamutpāda) conditioned co-arising or dependent origination.[65] This teaches that everything is connected by cause and effect

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[58] "24/7 Prayers for Lama Zopa Rinpoche's Swift Return | Kadampa Center," n.d. https://kadampa-center.org/247-prayers-lama-zopa-rinpoches-swift-return, (accessed October 7, 2024). Lama Yeshe Ling, "UPDATE: Combined Prayers for the Swift Return Kyabje Lama Zopa Rinpoche & Arunas Antanaitis – Online," June 9, 2023, https://lamayesheling.org/calendar-item/prayers-for-the-swift-return-kyabje-lama-zopa-rinpoche-in-person-online/.

[59] Tanya Zivkovic, *Death and Reincarnation in Tibetan Buddhism: In-between Bodies* (Routledge, 2014), 106.

[60] Zivkovic, *Death and Reincarnation in Tibetan*, 3.

[61] Zivkovic, *Death and Reincarnation in Tibetan*, 128.

[62] Zivkovic, *Death and Reincarnation in Tibetan*, 20-22. Thugdam: Your consciousness remains in a clear light meditation state for a few days after breath ceases.

[63] The best book to understand this phenomenon is Francis Tiso's *Rainbow Body and Resurrection: Spiritual Attainment, the Dissolution of the Material Body*, and the Case of Khenpo A. Cho 2016. Also see Sogyal Rinpoche's descriptions.

[64] *Prajnaparamita Sutras*

[65] It has 12 links: ignorance, mental formation, consciousness, name and form, the six senses, contact, feeling, craving, clinging, becoming, birth, and old age and death. See Coleman, Graham, and Thupten Jinpa, eds., *The Tibetan Book of the Dead: First complete translation* (Penguin UK, 2008), Introduction.

and is impermanent. Thus, nothing exists on its own and noting is independent, including ourselves. All things in the universe, thoughts and things are subject to this process. Everything is interconnected in the past, present and future. It is like the butterfly effect.

l) Emptiness (*sunyata*) – Emptiness [66] underlies both *Samsara* and *Nirvana*. This means that the world is neither permanent nor independent. Nirvana is also empty because it cannot be defined or described. It is not 'nothingness,' which is a common Western misperception. It can be understood to be an all containing awareness, a 'ground consciousness' or 'universal awareness' (*alayavijnana*).[67] Lauf explains that liberation from suffering in Samsara that arises from manifestations (*samskaras*) comes from stillness, control of the active thought processes, and freedom from the world while entering the ground consciousness. Lauf says, "*Nirvana* is absolute freedom from the world and from the manifestations (*samskaras*) from the *alayavijnana*; Samsara is every step out from ground consciousness into the world of appearances, and so also into the world of thoughts, which wells up from ground-consciousness in waves of thought."[68]

m) Death and Dying - Death is defined differently by Tibetans than by Western Physicians. This is a crucial and important difference that has an impact on much of the Near-Death Studies literature and its perspectives. In the West death is defined as cessation of brain activity, with no breathing and no heart beating. Tibetans recognize the moment when the breath stops but this is not considered the moment of death, for them there is no moment of death. Many of the western scientific reductionist explanations dismissing NDEs from arguments focusing on

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[66] Lama Lhanang prefers the term 'interbeing' or togetherness rather than emptiness. See Lama Lhanang, and Mordy Levine, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead for Beginners: A Guide to Living and Dying* (Sounds True, 2023), 23.

[67] Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan,* 19.

[68] Lauf, *Secret Doctrines of the Tibetan,* 19.

the physical brain would not make sense from a Tibetan perspective. The ancient view of the human body, its energy centers and balance of winds as displayed in Tibetan traditional medicine would not make sense to Western trained physicians.[69] Death is a process that can take several days to complete. Some Lamas spend days in Clear Light meditation before the warmth of their consciousness departs from their heart up through the top of the head.[70] This is why a dead body must not be touched or disturbed for at least three days, least it distracts the deceased from their Bardo journey. It is also why crying and strong emotion at deathbeds is discouraged. During the forty-nine day post death period funerary rites (*rje-'dzin*), are carried out and death instructions such as the Bardo Thödol are read aloud by a monk, Lama or *Ngag-pa* priest, since it is thought that the dead can hear the living recite them. Sacred mantras are also recited. Rituals allow for the disconnection between the deceased and the living, so the dead can move on easily unhindered by attachment which would stop their progress in the Bardo, and so the living left behind can heal. For the living to detach is the best help they can give their dead relative or friend.[71] Preparation for death is extremely important and one's life should be spent in preparation for the moment of death. Various techniques such as *phowa* (*'pho-ba*) have been developed to help one's consciousness exit the body. In the West, the dying just 'go with the flow' of the natural process of dying, but in Tibet prepare for death and its aftermath by studying and meditating on instructions outlining the actions they will need to take in the Bardo. The 'lion position' of lying in on the right side, in the position Sakyamuni took when he died, is

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[69] Barbara Gerke, and Rubin Museum of Art (New York, N.Y.), *Bodies in Balance: The Art of Tibetan Medicine*. Edited by Theresia Hofer. New York, Seattle: Rubin Museum of Art; in association with University of Washington Press, 2014. Janet Gyatso, *Being Human in a Buddhist World: An Intellectual History of Medicine in Early Modern Tibet* (Columbia University Press, 2015).

[70] Video of Lama Zopa Rinpoche in Clear Light Meditation in Kopan 2023. FPMT, "Video of Lama Zopa Rinpoche in Clear Light Meditation in Kopan," April 14, 2023, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mai_kjVmZP8.

[71] In Western folklore ghosts are those who do not realize that they are dead, or those who are overly attached to their homes or family. This echoes popular Tibetan ideas of spirits.

recommended. There is a great deal of English language Tibetan Buddhist literature aimed at dying well. The focus is on describing the dissolution of the body during the dying process and preparing for the expected experiences to come.[72] The Bardol Thödol, whilst a guidebook, is a generic template for all human deaths. It is not aimed at the specific individual. It is highly intellectual and complex. *Phowa* (*'pho-ba*)[73] can be performed either by the dying person, or by a religious specialist either by their side or remotely. [74]It refers to the technique of the transference of consciousness out of the body into the Bardo, or even to a Pure Land.[75] The deceased is told to break attachments and recognize the Luminosity of their minds and identify with the Buddhas.[76] Following Dharma teachings, empowerments, and lifelong practice are all in preparation for after death progress.

n) Dissolution of the elements in death – When you die, it is recommended to take the Lion's posture by lying on the right side, as Shakyamuni Buddha did, which allows consciousness to exit from the crown of the head. [77]Sogyal Rinpoche describes the dissolution of the inner and outer elements. The outer of physical process: Earth, Water, Fire and Air dissolve in that order, each resulting in a different bodily symptom and vision. The inner process is when thought states and emotions become more subtle.[78] The white and red elements (*bindus*) from our father and mother that joined at conception are separated as death progresses as they travel down and up the central channel or *avadhuti* to meet in the heart center. When this occurs consciousness and the *prana* principle (breath, lifeforce or psychic winds) unite and

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[72] See Thubten Zopa, *Heart Advice for Death and Dying* (FPMT Education Publication, 2008), 65.
[73] Zivkovic, *Death and Reincarnation in Tibetan,* 74.
[74] See Nydahl, *Fearless Death: Buddhist Wisdom,* 54-55. (*Phowa* chart see p. 179. in this book.)
[75] Reginald A. Ray, *Secret of the Vajra World: The Tantric Buddhism of Tibet* (Shambhala, 2001), 202.
[76] There is more than one Buddha, there are infinite numbers. Some like Siddhartha, manifested on Earth but others have been there for all eternity.
[77] Nydahl, *Fearless Death : Buddhist Wisdom,* 71 -78. (Charts for dissolution of the body on pp. 88-91).
[78] Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (Random House, 2008), 251-260.

consciousness can leave the body through various orifices, but preferably through the top of the head. NDEs and VTEs do mention the process of leaving and entering back into the body, and some have mentioned leaving through the top of the head. [79] When consciousness leaves the body there is an illusory body, similar to that experienced while dreaming.[80]

After the dissolution of the five elements and the three experiences of appearance, increase and attainment, the unfolding of the Bardo of Dharmata begins with what is called 'consciousness dissolving into space.' Then follows 'space dissolving into luminousity,' 'Luminosity dissolving into union,' 'union dissolving into wisdom,' 'wisdom dissolving into spontaneous presence' and finally 'spontaneous presence dissolving into primordial purity.'[81] If this opportunity is missed the Peaceful and then the Wrathful deities manifest in the Sambhogakaya level. If one does not recognize their essence, then the Bardo of becoming (sidpa) begins along with the continuation of habitual tendencies. At this stage one can remember one's guru, or Amitabha and visualize being born out of a lotus in a Pure Land. If one is just lost in darkness, then one will seek out a rebirth. One might see lights and be attracted to a light. Each light leads to one of the six realms, so it is important to choose the light going to the human realm. One might see a man and a woman having sexual intercourse. At this point one can project into the woman's womb. If one is attracted to the mother one will be male and if attracted to the father, a female. Chökyi Nyima says "The consciousness is like a fly and the red and white

[79] See Peter E. Johnson, 1898, (62xxvi). Peter E. Johnson,1898, saw the apostle place his hands upon the head of my prostrate body, and almost instantly I realized that the change had come, and I was again in the body. The first thing that I knew, I felt a warm life-giving spot on the crown of my head.

[80] Nyima, *The Bardo Guidebook*, 11.

[81] Nyima, *The Bardo Guidebook*, 13.

elements from the father and mother are like glue; one's mind sticks to that glue. " [82]This completes the cycle into the Bardo of rebirth and one enters the Bardo of life.[83]

o) Alternatives to the Bardo to rebirth route - There are various ways to escape Samsara, such as by reaching a state of realization and enlightenment about the essential nature of reality, or by asking for help from an already enlightened being such as a Buddha, who can grant rebirth in a Pure Land, which offers a chance to attain liberation. There is an alternative to passing through the Bardo into a new rebirth and that is the possibility of being reborn into a Pure Land. The Pure Lands are 'places' - innumerable Buddha fields outside of the six realms. The most well-known is Dewachen also referred to as Sukhavati, the Western Pure Land of the Buddha Amitabha. [84] Louise Child explains the role of Amitabha who can enable rebirth into Sukhavati.[85] Matthew Kalstein comments that "Tibetan prayers for rebirth in Sukhāvatī are so numerous that they form an identifiable sub-genre among liturgical works."[86] Kalstein also explains how *Phowa*, Amitabha and Sukhavati became interconnected.[87] Lowell Cook's excellent book Tibetan Pure Land Buddhism 2019,[88] discusses all historical and soteriological aspects of this topic. Unlike in Eastern Asia, Pure Land beliefs did not form a separate cut but were integrated into Vajrayana and one of many possibilities and alternatives as a rebirth realm

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[82] Nyima, *The Bardo Guidebook*, 15.

[83] I often wondered if Sigmund Freud, who frequented circles in Germany where Buddhist texts and ideas circulated, if this influenced his idea of the Oedipus Complex, or whether the idea was just serendipity. I also wondered if his idea of the subconscious was influenced by similar streams or was just a parallel realization.

[84] There are innumerable Buddhas. The one most Westerners think of is Buddha Shakyamuni (Siddhartha Gautama) who was a former Indian prince who lived about the 6th century BCE. (563-480 BDE approx.)

[85] Child, Louise. *Tantric Buddhism and Altered States of Consciousness: Durkheim, Emotional Energy and Visions Of The Consort.* (Routledge, 2016). Also, Vessantara. *Meeting the Buddhas : A Guide to Buddhas, Bodhisattvas, and Tantric Deities.* (Windhorse Publications, 1998), 99.

[86] Matthew T. Kapstein. *Buddhist Afterlife Beliefs and Funerary Practices*, 143. Liminal states and liminal beings in Moreman, *The Routledge Companion,* 146.

[87] Moreman, in *The Routledge Companion to Death,* 146.

[88] Lowell Cook, *Tibetan Pure Land Buddhism: Mipham Rinpoche on Self-Power and Other-Power* (Vajra Books, 2019).

in addition to the basic six realms. He explains the conflation of two deities, Amitayus and Amitabha who are often interchanged. They are often both referred to as Creator of Light, Infinite Life and Limitless Light, or Protector of Life. I think this is understandable because all deities and humans are ultimately interchangeable and the same in essence. He explains how the traditions originated in India and then developed their own distinct Tibetan characteristics on top. Cook says there are two ways to reach the Pure Lands, with by one's own self power and volition or by calling out to a deity for rescue.[89] He does mention that in some interpretations women are not allowed in the Pure Land.[90] There are few clear explanations about this in English texts. In ordinary discussions amongst laypersons, the idea is that a female discards her body at death and the Bardo Being is neither gender. I still have to resolve this issue, which reflects the "glass ceiling" nuns and laywomen have to overcome in the social structure of Tibetan society. Women are able to reach enlightenment in Tibetan Buddhism, but male bodies seem preferred, and even nuns are ordained in Taiwan as no order exists nowadays qualified to fully ordain them in Tibet so alternative ways have been devised via the Chinese and other East Asian traditions.[91] Sukhavati is a blissful heavenly paradise full of flowers and birds.[92] It is not too different from NDE descriptions of nature and vibrant colors and music. It is a place where liberation can be easily attained. Georgios Halkias's Luminous Bliss 2017 [93] is a large academic book focusing on

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[89] Lowell Cook, *Tibetan Pure Land Buddhism: Mipham Rinpoche on Self-Power and Other-Power* (Vajra Books, 2019), xvii.

[90] Cook, *Tibetan Pure Land Buddhism,* xix.

[91] Buddhism for Beginners, "Why Aren't Women Ordained in Buddhism? - Buddhism for Beginners," March 9, 2021, https://tricycle.org/beginners/buddhism/Buddhist-nuns-ordination/. Halkias, 2017, 228, note 117, & note 39.

[92] Cook, *Tibetan Pure Land Buddhism,* 5-6.

[93] Georgios T. Halkias, *Luminous Bliss: a Religious History of Pure Land Literature in Tibet* (University of Hawaii Press, 2017).

the Pure Land or Sukhavati. He examines both the shorter and longer Sukhavati Sutras[94] and gives a detailed background to the philosophy and doctrine of the belief system. He also refers to the Pure Land, which is an East Asian term, as Buddha-fields, and explains "otherworld" soteriology. One reason that the idea of these places exists is because there are an infinite number of Buddhas, and so logically, the idea of each having a sphere of compassion makes sense. He says: "In Tibetan translations from Sanskrit, Sukhāvatī is commonly rendered as the "field of a Buddha" (*sangs-rgyas kyi zhing*) or a "world-system" (*'jig-rten gyi khams*). The expression "Pure Land" resonates with the Chinese term *jingdu,* but is not found in Indian Buddhist literature, nor does it have a known Sanskrit antecedent."[95] One uniquely Tibetan idea is that of Tantric consciousness transfer to these realms.[96] The Standing Blade of Grass ritual is an example of a practice to send one's consciousness to Sukhavati, it is a Sukhāvatī plus *phowa* doctrinal blend. [97]Other Buddhas also have their own realms e.g., Tara's is called Yurold Kurpa, it is turquoise blue.[98] In a Tibetan twist however, all Pure Lands are ultimately one.

p) Death and Sky burial - Since the Bardo period is thought to last 49 days[99] this is the period of mourning and completion of rituals for the deceased. While the body is untouched until the signs that the consciousness has left the body, anything from three to several days, then the body receives disposal. Experts can tell from the heat at the center of the body and drops of body

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[94] The short *Sukhāvatīvyūha-sūtra* (imported from India during the Tibetan Empire) is printed in part 2 of Halkias, *Luminous Bliss.*

[95] Halkias, *Luminous Bliss,* 77.

[96] Halkias, *Luminous Bliss,* 139, 150.

[97] Halkias, *Luminous Bliss,* 156-7, 187.

[98] Lee Kane, "Tara's Splendid Turquoise Pure Land Yurlod Kurpa, Cooling Rays of Pure Vision in the Soothing Shelter." *Buddha Weekly: Buddhist Practices, Mindfulness, Meditation* (blog), March 12, 2024, https://buddhaweekly.com/aspire-to-taras-splendid-turquoise-pure-land-for-tree-huggers-and-environmentalists-a-place-to-meditate-on-oneness-with-blissful-nature/#google_vignette.

[99] Halkias, *Luminous Bliss,* 148. Theravada Buddhism asserts rebirth is immediate and has no bardo period of 49 days. Vajrayana places 49 days as an average but the average period can be shorter of longer. For example, a *tulku* can choose their rebirth and new body when they want.

liquid and other signs about whether the consciousness has left the body. The amount of time differs based on one's level of realization. Traditionally sky burial *(bya-rgod 'don)* was preferred and ecologically appropriate, but nowadays cremation is most common. [100]Some Lamas receive interment. Last year in May 2023 the Venerable Gyatrul Rinpoche received a full body sea burial off the California coast.[101] In Tibet and India astrologers might be consulted to find the most auspicious ate for the disposal of the body.

This dissertation could not possibly contain all the details of Vajrayana philosophy required for a full understanding of the Tibetan Book of the Dead and Delog narratives. There are many books written by practitioners that repeat the same basic themes, but in more detail.

<u>These are some of the best books and articles for further research:</u>

Cuevas, Bryan J., and Jacqueline Ilyse Stone, eds. *The Buddhist Dead: Practices, Discourses, Representations*. No. 20. University of Hawaii Press, 2007.

Karma-gliṅ-pa, Gyaltrul, and Padma Sambhava. *Natural Liberation: Padmasambhava's Teachings on the Six Bardos*. Translated by B. Alan Wallace. Boston: Wisdom Publications, 1998. (This is a companion book to the Tibetan Book of the Dead and deals with similar concepts. The latter focuses on liberation by hearing, but *Natural Liberation* adds other paths to liberation through other means, senses, and practices such as *phowa* and meditation)

[100] Sometimes parts of the deceased high Lama's remains are put into stupas or even added to pills. Feeding the vultures is a final act of compassion.

[101] https://vimala.org/the-sacred-sea-burial-of-venerable-gyatrul-dhomang-rinpoche/#:~:text=On%20May%2030th%2C%202023%2C%20the,remembrance%20of%20our%20precious%20teacher.

Karthar Rinpoche, and Chökyi Wangehuk. *Bardo: Interval of Possibility, Khenpo Karthar Rinpoche's Commentary on 'Aspiration for the Bardo'*. Translated by Yeshe Gyamtso. KTD Publications, 2007.

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Sna-tshogs-raṅ-grol, and Erik Pema Kunsang. *The Mirror of Mindfulness: The Cycle of the Four Bardos*. 1st Shambhala ed. Shambhala, 1989.

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